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## Clausewitz & Hegel on the dialectics and ethics of war

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# Clausewitz & Hegel on the Dialectics and Ethics of War

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# ABSTRACT

Scholars regularly refer to Hegel and Clausewitz when writing about war and peace, but none consider the two authors together as having jointly founded a ‘dialectical school’ of war theory, a rich tradition in political science, philosophy, strategy, and counter-strategic thought which has impacted the field so much, that it is often overlooked. We assume that the concepts it provided us existed all along, when in fact, these were observed, developed, written to help us understand war’s features and its relationship to the state, for example, escalation, the fog of war, friction, war as the continuation of policy by other means civil society, state rights, and the war to end all wars, to name only a few.

Their ideas about the dialectics of war have born the brunt of various criticisms, particularly because their use of holistic arguments have led some interpreters to refute this ‘whole’ by hacking away at what they perceive as its ‘parts’. For example, is the dialectical concept of war too closely tied to an ideal concept of state? In this case, it would exclude non-state actors, as well as any motivating factor that might not be policy-driven. And since this holism leads to absolute and universal concepts, for war itself, but arguably as well for war’s justification, has this led to making war more brutal? This thesis attempts to strike a balance between the original works and their many detractors, by setting limits to the holistic elements to the dialectical war theories, while also reclaiming the right to understand war as a whole, rather than merely the sum of what we perceive as its parts. To separate the two, however, means delving deep into the underlying logical and philosophical constructs upon which these theories are built, so that we can detach the synthetic from the analytic and the conditioned elements from the unconditioned, in order to frame arguments that are meant to be *categorical*, rather than qualified or relative.

In order to do this, there are three phases to the argument. The first is a genealogy of dialectical war theory in which its origins in the metaphysical debates of the Enlightenment are explored, and how this impacted the quest in war theory to uncover ‘principles of war’. Clausewitz’s refutation of such ‘principles’ will be shown to have been total and irreversible in its effect.

Next, the thesis will consider how dialectical reasoning builds upon itself, moving from the simple to the complex. The question of tactics and strategy sets the ground for revelations about the nature of war itself, and from this perception of war’s nature ultimately follows a set of questions regarding how war, its purpose and its limits, can be, and indeed have been framed within an apparently rational system of ethics.

It is in fact at the crux of the ethical question that this thesis takes a turn, clarifying its purpose, once it reaches the third item of discussion. When Clausewitz and Hegel are considered from the perspective of being the ‘founders of a dialectical school of war theory’, we arrive at a difficult puzzle. The greater the two authors appear to converge methodologically, the greater an inverse process appears to take shape with regard to ethics. While exploring a convergence in their understanding of the dialectic, the thesis will explore how the two arrived at mutually-exclusive ethics: Clausewitz understood war as the ‘instrument’ of a responsible agent, the state, whereas Hegel’s concept of war was imbued with self-justification, as a ‘right’ of the state.

A likely root of the disagreement is proposed: the distinct understanding of either Hegel or Clausewitz with regard to the concepts ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’. Having drawn this tentative conclusion regarding the how and the why a convergence and divergence coexists, the text proceeds to explore how this would live out in real life, by providing what appears to be the most purified example of the material manifestation of this ethical divide on fighting doctrines. While the communists ‘connected’ with Clausewitz, the anarchists shunned him altogether and connected instead with Hegel. Despite fighting for a single cause, these two groups were split ethically and strategically on the very diagonal that cuts across Hegel and Clausewitz. This empirical study allows us to grasp in concrete terms, actual, *categorical limits* to ‘instrumentality’ and ‘right’ in justifying modern secular war.

## NOTE

For reasons that will become more apparent throughout this thesis, my primary source for Clausewitz's *On War* is not the Howard/Paret translation, despite the fact it has generally become the norm amongst scholars. Rather, I will be referring to the Graham translation (Clausewitz, Carl Von. *On War*, Tr. J.J. Graham, Introduction Jan W. Honig, Barnes & Noble, 2004.). In my view, this older translation is far better suited to a study of the philosophical aspects of Clausewitz, since it is a more literal replica of the original, and while not always the most practical for everyday use, it is more helpful in uncovering word choices and concepts, which Clausewitz borrowed from philosophical literature.

# INTRODUCTION



Hegel and Clausewitz have been described as ‘*the* two great thinkers on war,’<sup>1</sup> an exclusive title which is hardly an exaggeration. The success of these two Prussian writers, who lived during the same era, in the same city, and died only a few days apart, has much to do with the time and place in which they lived. Indeed, Prussia was a major intellectual centre at the time: the works of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Goethe had set the bar high amongst contemporaries, while also stimulating a true golden age in philosophy. Furthermore, only decades earlier, Prussia had been at the height of its glory under Frederick II, and was suddenly reduced to a status one might compare to that of a puppet regime of the French, as a result of the formidable wars Napoleon brought eastward. The experience of war that the nation lived through undoubtedly served as a catalyst for Prussians to think about and write about war. Yet, beyond the context, something more contributed to raising Hegel and Clausewitz above all other war theorists, a shared method, which often has been missed in the interpretations of each, and has been altogether disregarded as a feature of both.

Hegel and Clausewitz are rarely considered in parallel, and have never been presented as the *co-founders of a tradition in war theory*. Whenever we do find both authors side by side in textbooks and articles, it is primarily to argue, as Creusinger, Schering, Howard and Gat have, that Clausewitz was influenced by Hegel, or as Aron and Paret argued, that he was not at all influenced by him. (The opposite influence, that is, Hegel being influenced by Clausewitz’s writings, could not have happened since Clausewitz’s major works were published after Hegel’s death.) While,

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<sup>1</sup> R. Girard. *Achèver Clausewitz* (Paris: Carnets Nord, 2007), p. 77 [emphasis added to reflect the original French grammar, in which exclusion is implied.]

admittedly, many other profound influences in the works of Clausewitz must be acknowledged in order best to appreciate Clausewitz's analyses, namely Montesquieu,<sup>2</sup> Machiavelli<sup>3</sup> and Scharnhorst,<sup>4</sup>; this essay will nonetheless argue in the same spirit as those in the first group who hold that the convergence with the Hegelian way of thinking was important to the development of Clausewitz's later works. That being said, there is no intention in the coming lines to offer additional 'proof' of influences; this is not an inquiry into who influenced who and why. Rather, and arguably more importantly, the thesis seeks to demonstrate the convergence of ideas, not for the sake of historicism, but in order to analyze how methods and systems of logic built in philosophy made their way into the art of war, which it to say, how they came about, how they worked in first field, and why, as a result, they also provided useful conclusions in the other field.

If Kant and Hegel's influence on Clausewitz are often contested, this stems principally from a lack of systematic study and the reliance on impressions of an influence on the one side, and the dogmatic belief that unless one finds the smoking barrel, a direct quotation, there's no point bothering at all to seek out gunshot holes and other demonstrations of someone having fired. There are two extremes positions on the matter. One group might argue that claiming there is no influence between two set of ideas on the grounds that one has not found a direct citation is a superficial

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<sup>2</sup> Raymond Aron, *Penser la Guerre*, Vol I (Paris : Gallimard, 1976), pp 23-24.

<sup>3</sup> Clausewitz took the time to write about Machiavelli and also makes numerous allusions to his works in *On War*, particularly on the issues of militias and the people's war. There is also undoubtedly much to be said about their similar concepts of art as means. In a letter written in 1809, Clausewitz explains with regret that Machiavelli's *Art of War* lacks the liberty and independence of judgment which characterized his political writings. He also questions Machiavelli's nostalgia for the wars of the Ancients, explaining that the solution is rather to revive the Spirit of war. (Clausewitz, Letter to Fichte, annexed in: Fichte, *Machiavel et autres écrits philosophiques et politiques*, Tr. et Pr. Par Luc Ferry et Alain Renaut (Paris : Payot, 1981), pp 197-203)

<sup>4</sup> In a letter to his fiancée, 28 Jan. 1807, Clausewitz refers to Scharnhorst as the 'father and friend of my Spirit'; K. Linnebach (ed.) *Carl und Marie von Clausewitz, Ein Lebensbild in Briefen und Tagebuchblättern* (Berlin, 1916), p. 85.

interpretation which does not consider larger arguments that cannot be distilled into small linguistic segments. Yet, on the other hand, unless there is some analytical study with regard to the convergence of ideas on a larger scale, even finding one or two specific quotations would mean very little, since it could be shown that the tiniest direct link was offset by a much larger and all-encompassing lack of unity. Here the influence might be direct, but it would be the influence itself, not the interpretation, that appears superficial.

Perhaps the error has been to believe that a direct ‘influence’ is in fact what we are looking for. What matters most? Is it the origin of an idea, where it came from, and how someone found it, or is it not rather *why* they made use of it, and *what effect* this had on the outcome of their writings? It seems to me that the latter half is more important. Whenever Clausewitz’s ideas converged with those of Kant and Hegel, the effect was to generate some of the very most effective passages in his work. Whether Clausewitz’s genius was to generate the same frameworks of thought as both Kant and Hegel without having read either, which I doubt, the effect is that converging elements are there to be found, and the more we understand these, the better we can grasp the mechanics or underlying logic and methods that created many of these powerful passages in *On War*. One might salivate at being he who uncovers beyond all doubt direct links and direct influence, but if we limit our purpose to understanding Clausewitz better, it is enough to forgo this objective and cut to the chase: what are the similarities, what are the differences, and what effect do these generate.

Exploring the various links between Clausewitz and either Kant or Hegel, however, means going up against a very credible and erudite source who stood on the opposite side of the argument. Raymond Aron, a 20<sup>th</sup> century pillar of French philosophy, wrote a thorough reflection on the works of Clausewitz in which he

makes a convincing case regarding the lack of influence that links Clausewitz to either Hegel or Kant, but one that has many flaws nonetheless. Proposing a counterargument, however, is no easy task, because it cannot be achieved without a deep reading of all three of the above Prussian thinkers. One must tease out not only general similarities, but quite specific terms, language and methods, which travelled from the two philosophers into the works of the war theorist. Peter Paret may argue that ‘Relating Clausewitz to Kant or Hegel almost necessarily results in forced and unconvincing historical constructions,’<sup>5</sup> but in reality, these are only unconvincing insofar as they are forced.

As long as this thesis sets as its limit to expose rather than force conclusions, then this task may yet have some serious merit: to help us understand both the origin and the meaning of various concepts in international relations that are often taken for granted and misrepresented. The problem with our knowledge of works of Kant, Hegel and Clausewitz on war and state is that these are so influential in the field of war theory and international relations, their impact so sweeping, that we often fail to notice their contributions at all. That is, we take for granted what their theories provided posterity, because they permeate every aspect of it and appear to us as common sense, when in fact these ideas and conclusions were not always known, they were observed, developed, and written. They include, among so many others, civil society, state interest and state rights, escalation in war, the distinction between strategy and tactics, absolute war and real war, the fog of war, friction in warfare, and the oft-cited adage ‘war is the continuation of policy by other means’. These are Clausewitzian and Hegelian ideas. And if we turn to the philosopher who fathered the bases of their shared system of logic, Immanuel Kant, then we would also have to add

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<sup>5</sup> Paret, Peter. ‘Education, Politics and War in the Life of Clausewitz’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 29, No. 3, (Jul-Sept 1968), p. 395

a few more concepts to the lot: perpetual peace, the League of Nations, and the United Nations. And finally, since we are using a family analogy, we might also add communism, anarchism, and class warfare, since Marx, Engels, Bakunin and Kropotkin might be described as the troublesome offspring of this revolution in thinking. Kant, followed by Hegel, provided the initial philosophical context, the method, and a system of logic that took shape in the words of the former, and was further developed in the words of the latter. Years later, the four revolutionary writers would found economic and sociological theories derived from this method of reasoning, whereas Clausewitz and Hegel lit the flame of its application to the study of war and state. Altogether, this single family of thought, split into three generations of theorists, played such an overwhelming role in shaping and defining our current conception of world affairs that we might be surprised to find that it could possibly originate in one single idea uniting them all, namely, the dialectic.

Once we have uncovered the dialectic as the source of these concepts, a second and more problematic issue comes up, which again, justifies further inquiry into the depth and meaning of dialectical reasoning among these authors. If Paret sees this as inconsequential, probably because he perceived dialectics to have been no more than ‘standard equipment’<sup>6</sup> in 19<sup>th</sup> century German thought, what he misses is that dialectics might have been widespread, but they definitely were not standardized. There were distinctions with regard to the method from one author to another; and today, when the dialectic is no longer ‘standard equipment’ among scholars, it is useful to remind ourselves of the method’s origins, subtleties and complexities, if we wish to see what impact it had on the study of war. Both reasons for pushing ahead are in themselves legitimate, more so, given just how elusive dialectics can be. The

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Paret. *Clausewitz and the State*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 84

dialectical method, or methods rather, are difficult to grasp, and far more difficult to define. Scholars readily admit confusion with regard to its exact nature.<sup>7</sup> Schneider proposes that there are in fact seven distinct and potentially unrelated ‘meaning-clusters’ regarding the dialectic.<sup>8</sup> It is surprising that ‘thinking in twos’, if you will, though it might at first appear quite simple, does in fact generate much complexity. This has everything to do with the fact we are dealing with a system of paradoxes by definition. The word ‘dialectic’ comes to us from the Greek, where the first element ‘dia’ means ‘two’, and the second, ‘logos’ literally means ‘speech’ or more broadly, ‘reasoning.’ Thus dialectics are the study of pairings, specifically oppositions, and the attempt to find truth at their intersection. The method has its origins in the ancient Greek ‘dialogues’, where interlocutors clarified objects of contention by the process of taking opposite stances, in order to uncover or extract higher truths. However, when we speak of dialectics today, it is usually with reference to its more recent embodiment, inspired by the ancients, but reinvented by the later rationalists of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the context of debates that will at first appear quite far removed from war studies.

Indeed, to find the origin of modern dialectics, one must turn to the origin, that is, the metaphysical debates of the Enlightenment and the quest to prove *scientifically* the existence of God, miracles and the human soul. In the context of these debates, dialectics were not constructed as mere exchanges of divergent opinions between dialoguers, but instead the process of uncovering deep paradoxes, contradictions and mutually exclusive categories of human knowledge, which emerge from our attempts to *know* the immaterial world. Could anything be further removed from the very real

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<sup>7</sup> Richard A Ball. ‘The Dialectical Method, Its Application to Social Theory’, *Social Forces*, Vol. 57:3, (March 1979), p. 785

<sup>8</sup> Idem.

and concrete manifestations of war? What might ‘speaking in twos’ provide to the field of war theory? To answer this, one must begin by searching for the commonality in war and god, or rather between trying to discover order in the disorder of war, using the methods philosophers had tried in order to find cosmos and God in the chaos of the universe.

The context for the method is holistic. In response to questions about God and the universe, the method was an attempt to frame the whole, as oppose to the empiricists and rationalists who attempted to build a theory of the whole merely as a sum of its parts, and the causal relations that united them. As a result, some of the language borrowed from spirituality reappear in the works of Hegel and Clausewitz, most notably, in Hegel’s concept of spirit ‘Geist’ and Clausewitz’s description of war as a ‘wondrous trinity’.<sup>9</sup> Mimicking the concept of God, these theories attempt to uncover war’s eternal and universal essence.

The question then becomes, does dialectical logic actually provide an eternal and universal concept of war? Are their limits to its claims? Do these theories contain within themselves self-contradictions which existed from the very start, at inception, or which appeared historically as a result of any changes in weapons or political evolution, or any other factor which could conceivably impact the nature of war. That being said, an antithetical question must be asked, in taking this exploratory path: Even if we were to come to a positive conclusion on the matter, that there are self-contradictions, in either of the two forms suggested above, would we be forced to admit that dialectics are invalid? Not necessarily. If a contradiction bears fruit, that is, resolves itself in new and more complex questions and paradoxes, then the process of exposing end points to logic can be, in fact, a very powerful means of heightening our

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<sup>9</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Book I, Chapter 1, p. 19

understanding. If it can be demonstrated that a final breakdown in the logic of the dialectics of war does indeed emerge, we may find ourselves exasperated to discover that it is precisely dialectical thinking which allows us to make sense of such contradictions, that is, the more we turn the dialectics of war onto itself and study it through its own lens, the more we may uncover its inherent weaknesses, but only as a result of the power of dialectical reasoning, which allows us not only to assess the subject critically, but also the very method for studying it. Turning the dialectic onto itself is both a means to shed light on the method's greatest benefit, which is to expose its own internal contradictions and build upon them. The strength of the method is its weaknesses and vice-versa. It is a frustrating paradox.

This thesis will present three different levels of dialectical war theory. The first and second levels are the subject of Part I, and derive exclusively from the works of Clausewitz. The third involves both Hegel and Clausewitz, and will be featured in Part II. Roughly speaking, they represent three interrogations in the following order: 'How is war to be fought?' 'What is war?' 'And why is there war?' The first is about method, the second is ontological, and the third deals with ethics, agency, and responsibility. At first this may appear a counterintuitive order of study, why consider the 'how' before the 'what'? The answer will become clearer later, but it has to do with the fact that we necessarily begin with a subjective idea about the 'what', we know what it means for a nation or group of people to 'go to war'. However, to achieve an objective idea of war's internal logic, the nature of the beast, the study of war's methods, and the contradictions that arise in studying attempts at codifying war into rules and principles releases an objective ontology of war that is far beyond the initial, subjective idea.



With regard to method, or strategy and tactics, Clausewitz categorically refuted the works of Enlightenment war theorists, who had proclaimed various grand ‘principles of war’ or ‘positive doctrines’ which were meant to provide generals with foolproof systems to ‘cause’ victory, with a physical or mathematical form of certainty. This refutation borrowed heavily from Kant and was not a fruitful dialectic, which opens discourse and ideas, but rather one that shut down a certain way of thinking. As we shall see in the first chapters of Part I, it destroyed the very principle of there being principles of war, and this refutation was total, irreversible and therefore sterile or dead in its tracks. Since then, attempts at salvaging the principles of war have succumbed to a mix of circular logic and self-defeating *reductio ad absurdum* forms of logic.

It is the other two ‘moments’ of Clausewitz dialectical theory which are fertile. The second moment is his exploration of the real war / absolute war dichotomy, in which the former is a representation of what war looks like in real life, with its material limitations, its frictions and fogs, and possibly limited aims, which hold back the rise to extremes in reciprocal violence. The second is the ideal form, what a war would look like if it had no such limitations at all. Inventing an ‘ideal’ is a conceptual method of analysis which allows us better to understand the beast: what is this all-out form of war that knows no bounds? It is a fertile question, because, unlike with his first level of dialectic, it is not merely refuting something that is illogical, it is positing a method of analysis regarding war, which must necessarily be flexible in time, because weaponry and aims in war or not fixed, but progress historically. Thus, real and absolute wars are not forced to take on the same form at all times and for all time.

With regard to the third question, ‘why’, the angle implied in the context of this study is not so much that of the ‘causes of war’, where the ‘why’ is directed at

this or that specific war or battle, but a larger, overarching concept of the question ‘why’, where we are seeking an answer to what grounds wars ethically, why do we release this ‘evil’, how is war ‘rational’ within a system of ‘greater good’ and ‘lesser evils’, or alternatively, how do we ‘rationalize’ it?

As we enter the question of ethics, there is an underlying stability to any rational attempt at theorizing about war: it is impossible to put forward a rational or rationalist theory of war without having a firm and inherent ethical framework upon which to edify it, for the simple reason that unjustified violence is inherently irrational, and irrational violence is inherently unjustified. This means that any rational theory of war which cannot clarify or generate a logically sound ethical system which frames it, cannot be a legitimate method for understanding war. It fails the surest test of its own validity.

Within this third level of dialectical analysis, we find in the works of Hegel and Clausewitz their most challenging and fruitful interrogations. When applied to modern war, they are even more interesting because the paradoxes they engage with are at the very crux of war’s historical development, the threshold of its own capacity to be rational or rationalized. The nineteenth and twentieth century gave rise to technologies and doctrines that were founded on seemingly absurd, irrational premises based on circular logic, concepts such as the ‘war to end all wars’ and ‘mutually assured destruction,’ which might in fact have been carried out as rational policy, regardless of their apparent absurdity. Can the ethical constructs developed in the dialectical theories of war help clarify our ideas of war even at this very threshold between the rational and the irrational? The way to approach the question will be to determine where the limits of these theories are to be drawn, precisely on the question of ethics, because it is the larger picture, that which encompasses all of war, it is

developed in a way that mimics God in part because it represents the whole, but arguably also because its claim to provide judgment on ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in war is a secularization process, the usurpation of what once belonged exclusively to the powers of gods.

The problem we encounter, in hoping to provide some analysis on these grand questions, and how they relate to dialectical war theory defined as a single tradition, is that no single, complete dialectical theory of war exists proper. The two we encounter in Hegel and Clausewitz are in fact only partial dialectical theories of war. In Clausewitz, we find that the work is generally not dialectical in construct and that the method applies principally to a few set of concepts, most notably in his discussion of the dual concepts of war as both ‘real’ and ‘absolute’. From this dichotomy emerges the idea that the political nature of war is inherent to both forms and thus serves as an explanatory and transcendental aspect of this contradiction. So Clausewitz has generated a concept of war that is dialectical in itself, but it floats in a universe of other considerations which are not dialectically constructed. While his theory attempts a holistic concept of war, it builds it up in a non-holistic thought environment, which limits this holism.

Hegel does the inverse. His universe is dialectical and contains within this logic historical and social processes that produce war. That being said, war itself, the way it is described is not set up as a dialectical concept in-itself. In Hegel, we learn that the notion of right (*Recht*) emerges and how the state becomes a self-conscious subject, but the laws which are posited and the wars that are fought are not dialectically constructed, since it is not necessary to Hegel’s method. In Hegel, ‘war’ is simply

‘war’, a unitary concept which is willed and materialized by peoples and states, whose inherent right to wage war, regardless of its form, is ethically grounded in a dialectical system that generates the state. Hence, for Hegel war is not a dialectical thing, but everything around it, which gives it material life, the state, the citizen, the ethical logic for war, and history itself, are dialectically constructed. His holism surrounds war, but does not encompass it in the same way Clausewitz achieves.

As a result of this split, it would be an overstatement to claim that we are studying ‘a dialectical theory of war’ in this essay. In fact, the exploration upon which we are embarking is a substratum of this: we shall consider the building blocks of such a theory, two methods of it that are at times similar, at times distinct, but in both cases fragments of what a whole dialectical theory of war might encompass. Luckily, this task has been made simpler for us, by what appears to be a fortuitous coincidence: while Hegel and Clausewitz are neither purely dialectical in their methodology, where they use the method and where they do not are perfectly symmetrical and reciprocal. Their distinctions allow us to clarify the methodology, while also shaping one if its apparent foundational contradictions, which occurs in the realm of ethics.

If the study of Clausewitz and Hegel together is on the one hand facilitated by the symmetrical way in which both authors were using and not using the dialectic, the major conundrum appears in the question of ethics, where the conclusions of either author regarding the justification of war are mutually exclusive and in direct contradiction. Any attempt to bring together Clausewitz and Hegel methodologically into a single dialectical theory of war can only lead to a hopeless dead-end if by the same process we cannot reconcile an ethical dimension that encompasses the divide. We would wind up with an inapplicable theory of war, methodologically coherent, but

contradictory in its ethical conclusions. And this, would indeed fail the test mentioned above regarding ethics and rationality.

The purpose of this essay is not to reconcile the two fragments, but perhaps provide the necessary groundwork which might allow such a project eventually to take shape. The task here is limited to showing the origins and development of the method by starting with a genealogy and ending with the ethical impasse between the two. Though later chapters will describe in far more detail how both authors arrived at opposite ethical perspectives into the nature of war, it is worth briefly describing the disagreement, at this early stage in the thesis, as something to keep in mind throughout. Hegel portrays war as a self-justifying expression of 'Right' and a necessary aspect of the survival of the idea of a people, whose independence and existence are otherwise 'mortal and transient.'<sup>10</sup> He also suggests that war allows societies to maintain themselves and better themselves, as is made evident in the following two lines from the *Philosophy of Right*: 1) 'Successful wars have checked domestic unrest and consolidated the power of the state at home,'<sup>11</sup> and 2) 'Just as the blowing of the winds preserves the seas from the foulness which would be the result of a prolonged calm, so as corruption in nations would be the product of prolonged, let alone 'perpetual' peace'<sup>12</sup>

Alternatively, Clausewitz distinguishes the political actor from the concept of war, and subordinates war as a tool of the political will, which he refers to as 'the intelligence of the personified state'<sup>13</sup>. In that sense, war is not imbued with any self-justification or inherent right. While most academics who quote Clausewitz on this

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<sup>10</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, tr. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), # 324

<sup>11</sup> Hegel. *Philosophy of Right*, # 324, p. 210

<sup>12</sup> Hegel. *Philosophy of Right*, # 324, p. 210

<sup>13</sup> Carl von Clausewitz. *On War*, Tr. Graham. Intro. Jan W. Honig (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), Bk I, Ch1, p. 18

topic quickly skim the introduction and reach for what they assume is a founding maxim of the entire work, that ‘war is a continuation of policy by other means’, it is rather in Book VIII that we learn that the idea is a conclusion, a synthetic reconciliation of ‘real war’ and ‘absolute war’, in which the ‘unity is that war is only part of political intercourse, therefore by no means an independent thing in itself.’<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, this relationship is hierarchical: war is not an expression of a people’s collective being in itself; rather, the ‘all-overpowering element of War’ is made out into a ‘mere instrument’ of their political will or government.<sup>15</sup>

Does this distinction between war understood as instrumentality and war understood as a right actually have any bearing in real life? Does it have measurable, tangible impacts? If that were not the case, then the thesis as a whole would serve little purpose. It would wallow in the miseries of futility. The only way to show that it is significant is to provide a case study where we can isolate either approach. History provides us with one particular context where both ethical approaches have been isolated for us: the anti-bourgeois revolutions. Though the communists and anarchists most probably did so without being fully conscious of the distinction, were in fact embodying in their fighting doctrines this very ethical division. Although the two groups were fighting a single war, they diverged entirely on the political or anti-political purpose and methods of their revolution. As a result, the Marxist would become heavily indebted to Clausewitz, while the Anarchists would shun him and bring their strategic thought more closely in line with Hegel. The very concrete set of examples that we uncover in the revolutionary left provides clear opportunities to understand in what sense the ethical divide splitting Clausewitz and Hegel had

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<sup>14</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk VIII, Ch. 6B, p. 674

<sup>15</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk VIII, Ch. 6B, p. 675

measurable effects on how war and revolution would be carried out, be it as an 'instrument' or a 'right'.

To sum up, the thesis must accomplish three things. First, to tie the Hegelian and Clausewitzian methodologies back to their philosophical roots in the metaphysical debates of the enlightenment; second, to show what these ties meant and how they impacted and continue to impact our concept of war, and finally to show not only that within a converging methodology, a divergence on ethics could simultaneously appear, but also that this divergence in ethics has real and tangible ramifications that have been felt in the history of warfare since.

## A CAVEAT – How to Approach Claims that Hegel and Clausewitz Generate Self- Fulfilling Prophecies & War Mongering



There are many reasons to be wary and concerned with how Hegel and Clausewitz understood war. And it is worth dealing with some of these problems before diving into this research project. To engage with Hegel and Clausewitz can be controversial,<sup>16</sup> especially if the end goal is to legitimize and elevate their ideas. It has even been said of Clausewitz that he ‘glorified war [...] and was obsessed by a cruel passion’<sup>17</sup> It is therefore necessary to tread carefully and provide the proper context and clarification, because otherwise, one might quickly be brushed off as siding with authors who were apologists for bloodshed, and potentially even the intellectual backbone for 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarianism, total war, and even genocide. In the case of Hegel, this conclusion is also widespread, as Shlomo Avineri has argued, citing Heller, McGovern, Popper, and Bowle as examples.<sup>18</sup>

In his introduction to Clausewitz, Rapoport also adds that, ‘regardless of how [he] pictured war “carried out to its logical conclusion”, in the present political and technological environment the actualization of Clausewitz’s absolute war is total war, that is, genocide’,<sup>19</sup> while Van Creveld went further yet and more or less blamed Clausewitz specifically for Auschwitz.<sup>20</sup> But are these severe judgments warranted? To make that call, one must go through a long and arduous process of working through the ethical dimensions of the whole, and not merely quotes plucked here and there. When the dialectical method is properly contextualized in the works of Hegel

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<sup>16</sup> Avineri rightly suggests that, ‘While one can be lukewarm about Locke and objectively detached even about Kant or Rousseau, Hegel brings out the partisan in everyone: one is either for or against, and in a rather extremist fashion.’ In Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel Revisited*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Reappraisals (Apr., 1968), p. 133

<sup>17</sup> Anatol Rapoport, Introduction to Clausewitz’s *On War* in Clausewitz, *On War*, tr. Graham, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 79-80

<sup>18</sup> Avineri, ‘The Problem of War in Hegel’s Thought’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Oct.- Dec. 1961), p. 463

<sup>19</sup> Anatol Rapoport, Introduction to *On War*, in Clausewitz, p. 62

<sup>20</sup> Martin Van Creveld, *Transformation of War*, (Toronto: The Free Press, 1991) p. 65

and Clausewitz, it becomes simpler to refute these particular claims, but that alone is not enough to pass an alternative ethical judgment on the question. This short chapter is meant to clear enough space in the controversy so that we can move the debate on ethics and methodology away from context and deeper into the content itself.

It is indeed a severe jump to from claiming that Hegel and Clausewitz are amoral philosophers, in the lineage of Machiavelli and Hobbes before them, to then construing this as an opportunity to forgo the neutrality of amorality and brand them all simply as ‘immoral’. Morality, amorality and immorality are products of the larger ethical systems that define what is good and evil, and what is a lesser evil or a greater good. The deeper we consider the origin and complexities of the systems put in place by the two authors upon which to make their claims, the more we shall be forced to abandon the tempting move to ‘brand’ the two philosophers of war into a small box. It will become clearer that they were not unethical philosophers at all, but rather philosophers whose judgments on the subject of war were anchored in a modern, secular ethic.

Interestingly, the reason why the two authors have been brushed aside quickly, though not quite effectively, by authors keen on discrediting them the easy way, is built into two lines of argumentation that are very closely linked, though they might not appear so on the surface: the question of statehood and ethics. In the Hegelian tradition, as we shall see later, these two are one and the same, where the state is nothing more than the institutionalizing of an ethical system. The reader must keep in mind that it is important to distinguish the definition of ethics from the institutions that are built in its name, the form ethical concepts take when they are manifested, be it as a family unit, a group, a state, etc. The best way to achieve this distinction is

provided in fact by Hegel's work, which firmly grounds the matter on a dialectical process that allows these functions, outcomes, and definitions to coexist.

## The State Argument

The word 'state' will come up often in the next chapters and it is worth taking a step back at this point to qualify the term. We will consider what the term meant for Hegel briefly in the last lines of this section and will return to the question in full detail in Part II. For now, however, let us first consider how it relates to Clausewitz, since he bore the brunt of the 'state-centric' argument. This argument follows a typical route: since Clausewitz made his observations and prescriptions in the context of states in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these are necessarily tainted and inapplicable outside the state model. The recurring claim is that since non-state actors play a more important role today, or since there are multilateral organization establishing supranational norms and laws, a theory built on the state model cannot be adapted. Such a black-and-white breakdown of political actors into types is often a rhetorical tool of academicians, rather than a legitimate way to treat complex subject matter. Once we have considered these arguments in more detail, we might find that there are far more grey tones to uncover.

The two main proponents of this categorical dismissal of Clausewitz are Martin Van Creveld and John Keegan, who use a variety of different angles to question the political nature of war, and emphasize its cultural, individual, and historical aspects. Van Creveld argues that individual soldiers who gain from war, be it by capturing enemy soldiers for ransom, gaining the spoils of war or pleasing the Gods, have a vested interest in the war, and this undermines the idea of war as a

political end of the state.<sup>21</sup> Keegan adds, throughout his book, a similar confrontation of the Clausewitzian theory by suggesting that primitive warfare had no political ends but only cultural ones.

[Primitive peoples] accorded a high degree of ceremony and ritual to combat, the spur to and ends of which bore scant relation to the causes and results which modern man perceives in the wars he fights.<sup>22</sup>

In both cases, the authors attempt to invalidate ‘continuation of policy’ not by provide a direct hit to the centre of its idea, but with skirmishes at the flank: they showcase the existence of parallel determinants and motives in war, but they do not clarify in what sense these are in contradiction or for that matter mutually exclusive to Clausewitz’s argument. Are they make or break arguments, or merely a sub-level of interesting considerations from which to enrich our understanding of war? It would be foolish not to agree that fact that the rituals of combat and the personal objectives of the soldier can play a role in determining the form war will take, and will likely inform the deliberations, one way or another, regarding where a battle might take place, and when, and why, but this very process of deliberation is in fact war’s social element, its collective and political element. If this process of deliberation exists in a state, or in a church, or in a tribal council, so be it, but this does not equate to an alternative formula where war is the continuation of religion by other means, or the continuation of tribalism by other means, it is in fact that instrumentalization of violence towards the policy aims of church, state, tribe, etc. Clausewitz’s formula is not undermined, only qualified further. In that sense, Keegan and Van Creveld have

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<sup>21</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, p. 66-72, 150, 151

<sup>22</sup> Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, p 114

made a useful contribution to the debate, have provided additional insight, but have not offered an effective refutation.

When reductionism is used to equate state to political will, we find ourselves merely discrediting Clausewitz on a technicality. Keegan, on the issue of ‘war as the continuation of policy by other means’, attempts to refute the idea by attaching it to a static interpretation of the word ‘State’, he writes, “...Clausewitz’s thought is incomplete. It implies the existence of States, of State interest and of rational calculation about how they may be achieved. Yet war antedates the State, diplomacy and strategy by many millennia.”<sup>23</sup> He does not explain how *On War* implies the existence of states, other than basing himself on the initial formulation of the state as the only embodiment of political will.

Van Creveld does the same. ‘That organized violence should only be called “war” if it were waged by the State, for the State, and against the State was a postulate that Clausewitz took almost for granted.’<sup>24</sup> From this, Van Creveld suggests that, ‘the dictum that war is the continuation of politics means nothing more or less than that it represents an instrument in the hands of the State, insofar as the State employs violence for political ends.’<sup>25</sup>

Though Rapoport does not take the argument as far as Van Creveld and Keegan do, it is nonetheless worth considering the subtle deviation he makes of Clausewitz’s writing in order to make the ‘state’ argument. He conditions the words ‘instrument of policy’ by tagging on the word ‘national’ to make his point.<sup>26</sup> It is misleading, because while a state is necessarily a group infused with a political will

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<sup>23</sup> John Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, p. 3

<sup>24</sup> Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*. p 36

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Rapoport,, *Introduction to Clausewitz’s On War*, pp. 50, 52

and capable of generating and enacting policy, policy and political will are not necessarily the product of statehood, nor does the formula ‘instrument of policy’ make that claim. That claim is not Clausewitz’s, but only Rapoport’s, who takes the formula and rewrites it in a new and misleading way: ‘instrument of national policy’. The state, or the nation-state if we want to take the idea further, is but one of many manifestations of coordinated and materialized political will, one institution out of many others capable of monopolizing violence and applying it towards its ends.

It is also true of Kaldor’s analysis of the role of state in Clausewitz. The passages she uses from *On War* to claim that Clausewitz speaks of state and only states, is in fact devoid of the word state. He writes that war ‘is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will’, to which Kaldor adds two modifications, first, that statehood is ‘implied’ in the ‘we’ and the ‘our opponent’, and second, that this statehood requires a ‘will’ that is clearly defined.<sup>27</sup> Both are quite external not only textually, but if we look at the question deeper, contextually in Clausewitz’s experience of the state.

If we understand the state, as Hegel and Clausewitz did, as a living thing, an embodiment of political will rather than some concept stuck in time, that is fulfilled, permanent and static, then it becomes easier to understand how the political nature of war is not identical or dependent on a state-centric concept of war. There is room in the concept of war as the continuation of policy formula for stateless insurgents on one end, and multilateral UN peacekeepers on the other. That being said, it would be fair to argue that both Clausewitz and Hegel hoped that war would indeed be absorbed into the state, because they perceived the state as a desirable way to conduct rational

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<sup>27</sup> Mary Kaldor, Mary. *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 15

policy in the interest of the people who resided within it. At the time of writing, this state, or better yet, this ideal, rational state that both authors imagined was not a done deal. That is precisely why they could idealize it in the first place. Nowadays we do not have that luxury. We see the state as what it is or has become, not what it could be.

The ideas of statehood and the political vigor of one's society were indeed central to Clausewitz's thought.<sup>28</sup> Clausewitz's life's work was geared towards shaping and strengthening and unifying his nation. He even wrote, in a letter to his fiancée, 'I sense within myself a specific striving after a noble purpose; in me – as in a well-administered state – all energies shall obey and serve this striving.'<sup>29</sup> However, his notion of State was not and could not have been static and absolute in the way it is presented by Van Creveld and Keegan.

The reason for the discrepancy can be attributed to historical differences. Van Creveld and Keegan are products of a time where states have for the most part been stable in their constitution and infused with internal coherence for decades, and in some cases centuries. This is particularly true in the Western world. During the revolutionary period, this was not the case at all. The entire political realm of Europe was fragile and in constant flux. Clearly, the authors are indeed using the term 'politics' in a 'very modern sense', as Roxborough has argued, because 'Prior to the modern secularization of discourse, which produced an autonomous sphere of politics, conflict about power ('politics') were not absent; political contention, rather, was often expressed in religious or tribal vocabulary.'<sup>30</sup> I would not go so far as

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<sup>28</sup> Paret, Peter. Clausewitz and the State, p. 6

<sup>29</sup> Clausewitz to Marie v. Bruhl, 29 March 1807, Correspondence, p 102.

<sup>30</sup> Ian Roxborough, Clausewitz and the Sociology of War, *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Dec., 1994), p. 627

Roxborough to then claim that war as a continuation of politics by other means itself depends on how the terms are defined,<sup>31</sup> but rather that one can build a convincing, though inaccurate argument based on that premise.

Clausewitz had a fluid understanding of the nature of states which have, much like war itself, its own set of moral factors. His concept of nation was one which 'achieves independence and unity, only to disappear once again' and is infused with the metaphysical and temporal idea of Will.<sup>32</sup> 'Even a disarmed and defeated France, as a homogenous, unified, well-situated, well-protected, wealthy, warlike and Spirited nation, contains within herself the means of securing her long-term integrity and independence.'<sup>33</sup> In discussing the demise of the Kingdom of Poland, he argued that sentimental grounds are insufficient to justify the restoration. He explained that it was impossible to grasp how or why nations come and go, but nonetheless warned the Germans against weak political structures and a divided sense of direction.<sup>34</sup>

Clausewitz's experience in war adds more to this impression. He could not have viewed the State as the one and only embodiment of political will. The first campaign in which he fought, at the age of 12, was against Revolutionary France in 1792-1793<sup>35</sup> before the revolution's political Will was institutionalized as a State. The first Revolutionary War was declared against Austria by the French Assembly on April 20<sup>th</sup> 1792, four months before the monarchy was abolished in France on Sept. 21s 1792 and the First Republic was proclaimed the next day. This was also eight months before France's absolute monarch Louis XVI was executed for treason Jan

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<sup>31</sup> Ian Roxborough, Clausewitz and the Sociology of War, *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Dec., 1994), p. 627

<sup>32</sup> Clausewitz, *Historical and Political Writings* tr. and ed. Paret & Moran, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp 372-373

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p 376

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p. 372-375

<sup>35</sup> Michael Howard, *Clausewitz: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp 6-7



21<sup>st</sup> 1793. There was a complexity in the political situation in France which could not be simplified into a single concept of state. Many political forces were at play, and all had access to the implements of war, be it through conscription, loyalists or foreign armies.

What then was the state for Clausewitz? It was a means of 'placing heavy demands on its citizens since it served cultural and national ends and thus enabled both the individual and society to achieve their innate potentials.'<sup>36</sup> Clausewitz's notion of the state was built up on a classification of means and ends: a tool by which peoples achieve national and its cultural ends. It was not an end in itself. Immobility and lack of vitality was what Clausewitz loathed. During his captivity after the fall of Jena, he wrote about his compatriots. 'With whips I would stir the lazy animal and teach it to burst the chains with which out of cowardice and fear it has permitted itself to be bound. I would spread an attitude throughout Germany, which like an antidote would eliminate with the destructive force the plague that is threatening to decay the Spirit of the nation.'<sup>37</sup> In this phrase again he hammered on the separation between political will and statehood. His own interpretation of his role in embodying the national political will was in opposition to people in his own state, even though he understood them as his own people. He even went so far as to fight alongside the Russians against his own King because he was appalled that Prussia had sided with the French, against its own national interest.<sup>38</sup> This is the ultimate proof that his concept of politics and state was complex rather than simple: he committed treason in order better to serve his country; out of patriotism, he crossed the line so as to free his homeland from those who conquered it and placed the king under tutelage.

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<sup>36</sup> Paret, Clausewitz and the State, p. 6

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* p. 129

<sup>38</sup> Howard, Clausewitz: A Very Short Introduction, pp. 9-10

Clausewitz was in effect carrying out a 'policy' of the state which was in fact not at all concordant with the state itself. He was in effect that stateless insurgent, the freedom fighter who carries with him a strong ideal of politics, which justifies and instrumentalizes violence.

With this in mind, it is worth reconsidering the argument that would discard Clausewitz on the grounds that the state has evolved or that non-state actor and international actors have come to the fore. Honig reminds us that 'The Clausewitzian idea of all military effort as being driven by an interaction between the trinity of government, military and people may have been based on the idea of the state, but it is adaptable to forms of warring social organization that do not form states. Any community has its leaders, fighters and common people.'<sup>39</sup> The same applies to Hegel, and I am tempted to take the argument one step further. Statehood is power *legitimized*, both internally and externally, whereby its territory, population, international voice, as well as the right to bear arms collectively are recognized. We should be capable of distinguishing groups whose objective is commercially driven from other 'non-state' actors that aspire to statehood in one form or another. Even though pirates and other organized crime groups and narco-states sometimes straddle a fine line, because the criminals are closely affiliated to political causes or attempt to usurp state power to benefit their criminal transactions, it remains that the proper measures of statehood, regardless of whether this state is achieved or emerging, is nothing more than its professed universality, that is to say, its legitimacy in the eyes of its people as a tool of their human development, coupled with its command of territory, a political system, and eventually, a likely result of the previous items, external recognition. Once we capture this distinction, it becomes clear that many, if

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<sup>39</sup> Jan Willem Honig. 'Strategy in a Post Clausewitzian Setting', in *The Clausewitzian Dictum and the Future of Western Military Strategy*, Ed. Gert de Nooy (The Hague, Kluwer Law, 1997), p. 109-110

not most non-state fighters have state aspirations, that is, aspirations to legitimize their political claims and rest them on territory, people and the monopoly of force. Far from excluding emerging or willed states, these aspiring states are perhaps even more state-like in their expression, more concrete and powerful in the minds of their would-be citizens who believe in them and who are willing to die for them, than in those states that have achieved their independence and may have succumbed to complacency and political apathy. And is this very political apathy not, at least in part, a result of having something that one has not fought for, or that one would not be willing or capable to fight for in their role within the realm of being a citizen of this established, bureaucratized, and professionalized political will? In the case of Clausewitz, he would have whipped these people, while he carried on their work of the defending the nation with every means at his disposal, even revolt against the state.

When we consider Clausewitz as a rebel himself, who fights against his king, it becomes difficult to offer full credit to Rapoport's argument that 'revolutionary wars are not 'Clausewitzian' wars of sovereign states.'<sup>40</sup> Sovereignty is not so clear-cut in Clausewitz's mind, and in fact if we truly want to take this discussion to its crux, it is all the more impossible that revolutions should be 'non-Clausewitzian' when we consider that Clausewitz's main example throughout *On War* is precisely that, the revolutionary wars of Napoleon. As we shall see later in this work, revolution is the very root of Clausewitz's interrogation on the nature of war, and his development of the concept 'absolute war' is exactly that, a term borrowed from Fichte to describe revolutionary wars, which Clausewitz further developed and defined.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Rapoport, Introduction to Clausewitz's *On War*, p. 53

<sup>41</sup> The full discussion is found in Part 1, Chapter 4 of this thesis.

If we return now to Hegel, his concept of the state as an embodiment of an ethical system is far more significant than whatever shape or form its institutions might take, he is not proposing a traditional definition of state as some settled or immobile and fixed thing, but a process which creates itself, asserts itself, renews itself, etc. In fact, he regards the independence and existence of a people as something ‘mortal’ and ‘transient’.<sup>42</sup> Far from resting his idea of state on firm and immortal instruments, bureaucracies, constitutions, etc., for Hegel, the state is a far more fluid thing; it is the ‘actuality of concrete freedom.’<sup>43</sup> Though cryptic when we encounter it at first, this central idea in Hegel’s notion of the state shed much light on the rest of his observations on the subject. However, it is too complex an idea to introduce properly so early in the text, and we shall consider it in full in Part II. At that point, it will become clear that the ethical system which governs our times, and which defines the range of activities which we allow the state to carry out, including war, are deeply intertwined with how we define freedom, and why some hold it as something so primordial to individual and collective development. Hegel teaches us that rights, both state rights and individual rights are not natural or god given, but created and developed as a process in an ethical community, which explains why these rights and liberties are constantly at risk and in flux. While Hegel was not an apologist for war, he nonetheless stood opposite those who hold that all wars are by definition evil and unethical, because he held freedom to be a greater good worth fighting for. If we consider the question of totalitarianism and Auschwitz in this context, we are forced to admit that as the total negation of freedom, both would be worth fighting against, if we stick word for word to what Hegel wrote. The association of Hegel to Nazism is for the most part an obscuration of facts. ‘Hegel was rarely cited in the Nazi literature,

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<sup>42</sup> Hegel. *Philosophy of Right*, # 324, p. 209-210

<sup>43</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, # 260, p.160-161

and, when he was referred to, it was usually by way of disapproval. The Nazis ‘official “philosopher” Alfred Rosenberg, mentioned, and denounced, Hegel twice in his best-selling *Der Mythos des Zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*.’<sup>44</sup> It is not surprising since totalitarianism was the antipode of Hegel’s idea of the state as the actualization of individual freedom. The two were irreconcilable.

How one defines the greater good is necessarily impacted by a variety of factors, such as culture, religion, and community, but it is important again to make the distinction between what it means to define this greater good and to institute it. War does not fit in the context of the former, no one defines war as a good thing in itself, but it relates to the latter. To instate one’s definition of the greater good is a political act. And it is within aspect of the equation that war may be legitimized, for Hegel and Clausewitz alike. Boxing in ‘politics’ into meaning state and only state, elevates a straw man and results in a refutation that is superficial at best, Bassford hit the nail on the head when he expressed the fact that Keegan was making use of ‘naive and one-dimensional definition of the word politics.’<sup>45</sup> The same can be said of many other interpreters of Clausewitz.

## The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Argument

The most damning and significant argument made by Keegan and Van Creveld is that following Clausewitz’s system of thought leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy of ‘total war’. If such conclusions were proven true, then all copies of On

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<sup>44</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *The Hegel Myth and its Method, From Shakespeare to Existentialism: Studies in Poetry, Religion, and Philosophy*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959) pp. 88-119

<sup>45</sup> Christopher Bassford, *John Keegan and the Grand Tradition of Trashing Clausewitz: A Polemic*, *War in History*, 1994: 1, p. 325

War would best be gathered up for a book burning of massive proportions, as a safeguard for generations to come. That is, unless we perceive the opposite possibility: that writing the brutal reality of what war can be is in fact that very safeguard against war going too far, becoming too extreme, and being fought for the wrong reasons.

The self-fulfilling argument was best spelled out by Keegan, who wrote that, 'In the post-primitive world, human ingenuity ripped ritual and ceremony, and the restraints they imposed on warmaking, away from warmaking practice, empowering men of violence to press its limits of tolerability to, and eventually beyond, the extreme. 'War' said Clausewitz the philosopher, 'is an act of violence pushed to its utmost bounds.' Clausewitz the practical warrior did not guess at the horrors toward which his philosophical logic led, but we have glimpsed them. [...] Unless we unlearn the habits we have taught ourselves, we shall not survive.'<sup>46</sup>

The reality is that one's interpretation is completely dependent on whether or not we attribute to the authors a prescriptive purpose or a warning, or perhaps a mixture of both. In his reply to Keegan, Bassford brings our attention to this important passage in *On War*:

Let us not hear of generals who conquer without bloodshed. If a bloody slaughter is a horrible sight, then that is a ground for paying more respect to war, but not for making the sword we wear blunter and

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<sup>46</sup> Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, p 385

blunter by degrees from feelings of humanity, until some one steps in with one that is sharp and lops off the arm from our body.<sup>47</sup>

To Keegan's presentation of Clausewitz as a Napoleonist and Shaka as a Clausewitzian, and his argument in favour of greater ritualization, Bassford retorts:

In actuality, then, Shaka, like Napoleon, was exactly what Clausewitz was warning us against, just as Keegan warns us against 'ethnic bigots, regional warlords, ideological intransigents, common pillagers and organized international criminals'. unfortunately, Keegan then goes on to tell us that 'there is a wisdom in ... symbolic ritual that needs to be rediscovered'. (Keegan, *Warfare*, p. 392) Perhaps he has forgotten the elaborate diplomatic dances that preceded the Gulf War and surround the problem in Bosnia. The danger in Keegan's suggestion, as Clausewitz pointed out, is that one side will substitute ritual for action while the other side acts decisively. Or does Keegan think his criminals will join in the ritual and submit to its restraints?<sup>48</sup>

A first aspect of these false interpretations can be attributed to the fact that one can accord far too much significance to the historical taints and the excessive word choices found in the texts, rather than the lessons proper. Some of these word choices are indeed quite maddening, but they should not blind us from the rest. It is important

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<sup>47</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Bk IV, Ch 11, p. 232 (note : Bassford uses the Howard/Paret translation, but for the sake of consistency, I have referred to the Graham translation)

<sup>48</sup> Bassford, *John Keegan and the Grand Tradition of Trashing Clausewitz: A Polemic*, p. 332

to keep in mind that both Hegel and Clausewitz lived through the very worst wars humanity had seen to date, and on top of that, they were writing on the subject of war from the perspective of a conquered people, they were on the losing side throughout most of the Napoleonic Wars, and both philosophers saw with their own eyes the French Revolutionary Army push forward into Jena-Auerstedt, site of the greatest Prussian defeat. How else were they to describe war? In soft and tender words meant not to offend?

With a short list of excerpts, we can indeed make up a damning portrait of the authors as heartless war mongers, but having read these, we must then question whether or not such distillations and dilutions are fair and accurate representations of the whole. Clausewitz did write some brutal lines, such as ‘Self-imposed restrictions, almost imperceptible and hardly worth mentioning, termed usages of International Law, accompany it without essentially impairing its power. Violence, that is to say physical force (for there is no moral force without the conception of states and law), is therefore the means; the compulsory submission of the enemy to our will is the ultimate object’<sup>49</sup> He also wrote that ‘philanthropists may easily imagine there is a skilful method of disarming and overcoming an enemy without causing great bloodshed, and that this is the proper tendency of the art of War. However plausible this may appear, still it is an error which must be extirpated; for in such dangerous things as war, the errors which proceed from a spirit of benevolence are just the worst.’<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. I, Ch 1, p. 1-2

<sup>50</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. I, Ch 1, p. 2



Hegel also had his fair share of apparently sinister quotes, including ‘War is the moral health of peoples in their struggle against petrification’<sup>51</sup>, and elsewhere suggesting that that the ‘ethical element in war’ [*das sittliche Moment des Krieges*] in war is implied by the final end of the state to provide freedom, individual life, security and property to its people,<sup>52</sup> leading him to conclude that, ‘war is not to be regarded as an absolute evil and as [purely accidental].’<sup>53</sup> Whether or not he was an apologist for war, there is no doubt that Hegel stood opposite those who hold that all wars are by definition evil and unethical.

Having read these widely quoted extracts, used primarily by those who seek to dismiss the two authors, quickly, rather than meaningfully; the next step is to ask whether these actually provide proof that there is something either immoral or illogical at the core of Hegel and Clausewitz’s philosophizing. If war is a brutal thing, then should an honest representation of war’s nature not also use the word ‘brutal’ in order to be accurate? The question of morality comes afterwards. By giving us an honest and frightening glimpse into the coarse nature of war, Hegel and Clausewitz provide posterity with the clarity required for self-restraint and self-control when brandishing the beast that is war. While some may perceive the language as a call to arms, we may equally choose to read these passages as warnings. That decision resides in the reader far more than the writer.

In the case of Clausewitz, failing to understand the dialectical constructs is problematic, because one such contradiction is the difference between a hypothetical ‘absolute’ war and war in the real world. Unless we catch the dichotomy, we are bound to make the most basic misinterpretation: where either pole of the dichotomy is

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<sup>51</sup> Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Tr. Baillie, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Blackmask, 2001), p. 432.

<sup>52</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, #324, p. 209-210

<sup>53</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, #324, p. 209-210

removed and considered in isolation. This would be like insisting to be served either a Ben's or a Jerry's ice cream cone, when in fact it is only Ben *and* Jerry's that can provide you with your treat. It is the same, when we consider that Clausewitz described war having a conceptual, 'absolute' form, and a 'real' material form, where the former represents its unlimited potential for reciprocation towards extremes, and the latter framing war as something limited by its purpose, aim, and scope, as well as the material realities of battlefield (friction, fog of war, etc.). The two poles only exist as a relation to one another. It is only because Clausewitz has conceptualized an 'absolute' that he must counter this conceptual and ideal formula with its opposite, a concrete manifestation, a real embodiment of the concept, which by the very process of being posited, is a demonstration that the ideal is *not* real. The ideal is meant to help us better conceptualize war, by freeing the inner logic from that which constrains and limits it.

By foregoing this analysis, we perceive two singular poles, unrelated and equally attainable as objectives. However, the problem here is that at either of these poles, war becomes nonsensical: fully 'real' war would be so bogged down by limited objectives, insecurities, uncertainties, and material considerations that it would reach a point of complete immobility: a long wait where no force comes into play: a non-war war. At the other end of the spectrum, a fully 'absolute' war would be so brutally fuelled by the reciprocation of extremes that it would eventually destroy everything one could possibly be fighting for in the first place, undermining its very own *raison d'être*.

This failure to appreciate the dialectics of Clausewitz has been the norm, not the exception amongst scholars and soldiers alike. In fact, the very best example we have comes from someone who as both a soldier and a scholar, Ferdinand Foch, who

cherry-picked only the most extreme snippets one can find in Clausewitz's *On War*, and contributed to the doctrine of *attack à outrance* during World War I. Foch's interpretation of Clausewitz was built on a distillation process, whereby the passages he prioritized in *On War* were those in which Clausewitz referred to Napoleon as the closest anyone had ever gotten to embodying the 'absolute' form of war. Indeed, the chapter on modern war found in *Principes de guerre*, Foch quoted Napoleon once and Clausewitz seven times, and of these seven quotes, only one was not an elevation of Napoleon and the concept of absolute war. In Foch's version of Clausewitz, the only parts of *On War* worth quoting are those that amplify war's brutality, and Foch attempts even to amplify these further. Thus, when he quotes Clausewitz as having said, 'blood is the price of victory,'<sup>54</sup> he unsurprisingly forgets the rest of the sentence in which Clausewitz writes, '[...] it is not merely reciprocal slaughter, and its effect is more a killing of the enemy's courage than of the enemy's soldiers.'<sup>55</sup> And elsewhere he continues to focus on the excerpts that amplify the extremes of war, rather than any principle of limitation, such as fog of war, friction and limited aims. So we find also among his chosen extracts: 'The French Revolution by the force and energy of principles and the enthusiasm which with it inspired the people, threw the weight of the people and all the forces into the balance'; '[Napoleon] relentlessly sought opportunities to engage in battle'; and, 'In war everything is submitted to decision by arms'.<sup>56</sup>

J.C. Fuller was of the opinion that Foch's interpretation was one based on 'a Clausewitz drunk on violence' and 'tactically demented Napoleon,'<sup>57</sup> which was probably not far from the mark. Foch's focus on the Napoleonic character of war

<sup>54</sup> Foch. *Principes de la guerre*, p. 33

<sup>55</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. IV, Ch 11, p. 230

<sup>56</sup> Foch. *Principes de la guerre*, p. 21-44

<sup>57</sup> Fuller, J.F.C. *The Conduct of War*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961), p. 128

should not come as a surprise; Foch himself was a devout Napoleonist. When France celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the Emperor's death at the *Arche de Triomphe*, Foch delivered a glowing eulogy. The first line sets the tone: 'Napoleon! If the prestige of this name conquered the admiration of the world, it is less certain that its luster continues to grow, as time casts a shadow on the greatness of the task accomplished.'<sup>58</sup> Foch's may have admired Clausewitz, but is not so clear that he actually understood him that well, given that 'his own writing is totally different in character.'<sup>59</sup> While Clausewitz stressed two important concepts in war, its political nature and the superiority of the defence, by the turn of the century, these two features had become somehow excluded from the analysis.<sup>60</sup> If Foch was 'dreadfully wrong [and] it took a sea of blood to prove it,'<sup>61</sup> we must admit that many others at the time were equally off-track in their interpretation of Clausewitzian thought. Across Europe and in North America as well, war theorists and generals had fallen victim this form of distillation, 'totally imbued with oversimplified neo-Clausewitzian ideas.'<sup>62</sup>

It is therefore not without reason that Liddell-Hart reacted harshly to this Clausewitz, but in reality, what he was reacting to were these bad interpretations of Clausewitz. Liddell-Hart's famously gave Clausewitz the nickname "Mahdi of mass and mutual massacre", on the grounds that Clausewitz, in his opinion, 'was the source of the doctrine of "absolute war", the fight to a finish theory which, beginning with the argument that "war is only a continuation of state policy by other means", ended by making policy the slave of strategy.'<sup>63</sup> Liddell-Hart had spelled out the most

<sup>58</sup> Foch, Ferdinand. *Eloge de Napoléon* (Paris: Les Iles d'or, 1947), p. 21

<sup>59</sup> Bernard Brodie. 'The Continuing Relevance of *On War*', Introduction to Clausewitz. *On War*, Tr. & Ed. Howard/Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 50

<sup>60</sup> Michael Howard. 'The Influence of Clausewitz,' Introduction to Clausewitz. *On War*, Tr. & Ed. Howard/Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 37-41

<sup>61</sup> Brodie. 'The Continuing Relevance of *On War*', p. 50

<sup>62</sup> Howard. 'The Influence of Clausewitz', p. 37

<sup>63</sup> Liddell Hart, *The Ghost of Napoleon* (Westport : Greenwood Press, 1980), p. 120-121

damning criticism of Clausewitz that had yet been written; he was suggesting that Clausewitz's theory was a self-fulfilling prophecy: that by defining strategy and war in a certain way, they were making war take that form ever more so. But this argument was only admissible insofar as it was an answer to misinterpretations of Clausewitz to begin with. If Clausewitz had been taken at his word, rather than his conceptual poles ripped apart from one another, then his writings would have maintained their strength of paradox, rather than taken on the weak form of isolated extremes. Liddell-Hart's reactions were against a pseudo-Clausewitzian doctrine, which Clausewitz had never actually written.

The pseudo-Clausewitzians of the turn of the century were not the true inheritors of Clausewitz, but undoubtedly the first to misread him so thoroughly badly as to generate self-fulfilling prophecies with regard to pre-empting war's rise to extremes by starting off with one's fullest national ability to produce extremes. By excluding half the concept, within a dialectical whole, one effectively destroys the root of the system before even engaging with it. Consequently, this does not pose a true problem to our analysis or reading of Clausewitz, because the problem is not with Clausewitz, but faulty interpretations of his work.

With regard to Hegel, the question of war as 'the moral health of peoples' is a complicated one, which will be considered in greater detail later in the coming chapters. However, with regard to the issue of self-fulfilling prophecies, we have not completely solved the problem by eliminating it from our discussion of Clausewitz. There exists a far more compelling argument regarding self-fulfilling tendencies in the works of Hegel, who speaks of 'necessity' as though history is following a set path. In this case, we are no longer dealing with the particular absolute/real construct of war, but rather war within Hegel's dialectics of history, and the materialization of

this evasive concept, which we will be studying in greater depth in Part II, the ‘world Spirit’ or *Geist*.

Hannah Arendt questions the notion of history in Hegel’s philosophy, arguing that it commits a fallacy that ‘consists in describing and understanding the whole realm of human action, not in terms of the actor and the agent, but from the standpoint of the spectator who watches the spectacle, [...] the truth inherent in it, [being that] all stories begun and enacted by men unfold their true meaning only when they have come to their end, so that it may indeed appear as though only the spectator, and not the agent, can hope to understand what actually happened.’<sup>64</sup> A self-fulfilling prophecy argument is implied in that if events can be proclaimed as destiny, and the agents in the action perceive themselves as an active part of historically necessity’s fulfilment, then they it implies that they are turning Hegel around from studying the past into predicting the future, and setting the course to fulfilling it.

Arguably, this fault is rather a product of Marxism than Hegelianism *per se*, and it would be difficult to deny that throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, this idea of ‘historical necessity’ served as a justification and perhaps even the theoretical backbone of the ideological struggles against capitalism. However, while it was taken from Hegel’s system, historical necessity was not constructed in a way that could be pushed forward into the future, implying ‘necessary’ courses or directions for history and society. It was a misuse of Hegel’s method. In fact, Hegel was quite clear about how his system was not endowed with any claim about the future or the path which destiny was to take. In the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, he wrote, ‘The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk,’<sup>65</sup> by which he meant, in

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<sup>64</sup> Arendt. *On Revolution*, pp. 42-43

<sup>65</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy Of Right*, preface, p. 13

reference to the Roman goddess of wisdom (Athena in Ancient Greece), ‘that philosophy understands reality only after the event. It cannot prescribe how the world ought to be.’<sup>66</sup>

Just as we saw with Clausewitz, Hegel’s system is not self-prophetic in itself, but was used by ambitious interpreters to generate a self-fulfilling prophecy in his name. Both Hegel and Clausewitz were used and abused to provide clout and credibility to doctrines which they would never have acknowledged as their own. Arendt was right to suggest that historical actors made use of Hegel by proclaiming self-fulfilling prophecies: projecting ‘historical necessity’ forward onto the future that one’s ideology is attempting to build. In many ways, the distillation of Clausewitz is a parallel phenomenon. In either case, one cannot blame the words in the text, if the fault clearly lies with the reader. Again, it is necessary to stress that with Hegel and Clausewitz alike, the only way properly to dispel the claims regarding self-fulfilling prophecies is to enhance our understanding of their dialectics, and the origin and logic of their systems.

This ends our preliminary encounter with problems associated to the works Hegel and Clausewitz. They have been described as war-mongers and war apologists, and their systems have been called mere self-fulfilling prophecies, however, in the case of Clausewitz, there is simply a thorough lack of rigor any attempt to discredit the theory by first splitting apart the pairs ‘absolute’ and ‘real’ and then attacking the conceptual part, ‘absolute’ for the very reason that it is *not* ‘real’. With regard to Hegel, those who withhold the whole of his work in order to home in on tiny snippets are equally inapt, but the concern with historical necessity is a far more serious and

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<sup>66</sup> Singer, Peter, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (ed.) Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 638

credible problem. The only way to cope with the latter is to stick strictly to Hegel's own prescription regarding the future, separating Marxist interpretations from the original, and being openly critical to any claim that something can embody 'historical necessity' into the future as a proclaimed instrument of progress.

With this short caveat, an open mind, and academic rigor, it is possible to deepen our understanding of both authors, and extract extremely potent lessons regarding war and peace. Much would be lost were we stop our analysis on account of an offensive line or a quick and superficial dismissal. There are, as we shall see, true problems with the historical evolution of the Clausewitzian and Hegelian systems, which are far more complex and significant than the non-problems above. Yet, to perceive them, we must start by understanding them well, and in the context of when they were written.

If we arrive at endpoints in the logic that generates the contradictory systems of ethics at the heart of Hegel and Clausewitz's, then it will be possible to make judgements not on the perceived 'self-fulfilling prophecies' of their conclusions, but rather the conclusions themselves. And instead of teasing out historical anomalies in how states and non-state actors have evolved with regard to their conclusions, or how weapons and technology have changed over time, we will be able to consider in broader terms, ethical terms, the problems at the heart of these, in ways that apply not merely to the state, the faction, or the revolutionary, but the very abstractions that generate a sense of 'good' or 'evil', or 'lesser evil' that gives rise to the justification of political violence, its rationality and rationalization alike, and the form political violence takes, when the framework of ethics we attach it to changes.

However, before we can hope to even approach this level of discussion on the dialectics of war without falling into the trap of oversimplification and superficial



judgments on the subject, we must start ground up. It means going back a few hundred years and understanding the philosophical context that gave rise to the dialectical method and its application to the question of war.

To speak of a Hegelian and Clausewitzian ethic on the subject of war may appear counter-intuitive to those who perceive both authors as amoral or immoral. However, through our exploration of the Kantian revolution in thinking and its impact on these two authors, the notion of 'instrumentality' and 'right' will lose their opacity. We will rest our understanding of these not only on their inception, development, method, and ultimate clash, but also in action, where history provides a critical demonstration of its significance. From this process, it will be possible to understand and pass judgment not merely on the conditioning elements, what the context provides, but also those features of the dialectical theories of war that are unconditioned and synthetical.

## PART ONE – The Birth of Dialectical War Theory

## Introduction to Part I

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Dialectical reasoning was introduced to the question of war's nature and its methods by Clausewitz as a response to a historical impasse or breakdown in war theory. Fuelled by an optimistic quest to unearth true, immutable, and fundamental 'principles' for the military arts, writers of the Enlightenment had fallen into a 'Pythagorean obsession,'<sup>67</sup> as they aimed, but never actually succeeded in achieving a 'military science' in the Newtonian or Galilean sense. War theorists had become increasingly didactical and pedantic in their use of geometry, mechanistic notions of the engagement, mathematical formulae, ballistics, clockwork and time management in this quest, but despite these efforts to isolate, organize, systematize the study of war, they wound up hitting a brick wall. These so-called principles and methods, which by many accounts had been the source of Prussia's greatness under the reign of Frederick II, crumbled before the pressures of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Only through dialectical reasoning and its implication on the study of human understanding and the scope of possible knowledge, inspired by the works of Kant

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<sup>67</sup> Fernandez-Vega, José, *Las guerras de la política: Clausewitz de Maquiavelo a Peron* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2005), p. 64

and his disciples, could Clausewitz explain in what sense the methodology of the Enlightenment had failed and was necessarily predisposed to such failure.

If the principles of war were meant to provide ready-made answers regardless of context, it was in fact context itself that had brought them to their final impasse. Whereas warfare between absolute monarchs had inherent limiting features, that is, a risk aversion based on the need to protect the institution of monarchy itself from self-destruction, the types of risks peoples were willing to take in their revolution against this institution was of a higher scale. Hence the surge of intensity during the French Revolution, which, as Clausewitz described, ‘beggared all imagination.’<sup>68</sup> The size of the engagements, the passions of the new citizen-soldiers, and the distances traveled by the troops – from one end of Europe to the other – would undermine the conceptual bases of military thinking. The social element of war had been unleashed, and no scientific theory, which claimed to provide the sure method towards victory, could stand up to the sheer power and disturbances of the masses, and the escalation of the stakes. The principles of war might have had some value to them, but only so long as all the players were abiding by the same rules and playing the same game. However, in the context of revolutionary fervour, the chessboard of European warfare, with its regular chequered squares and pieces, had been tossed to the floor, its principles dispersed.

How could it be that even in the hands of the best veteran armies in Europe, these principles couldn’t contain the rise of Napoleon’s Revolutionary Army, composed of mere conscripts, young and inexperienced revolutionaries with little training and no experience in battle? Behind the veil of this larger question, other smaller questions also came to the fore, regarding specific examples of failed

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<sup>68</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, (Tr.) Howard/Paret, Bk. VIII, Ch. 3. p. 592

strategies and tactics in the final days of the Napoleonic Wars: Why did the conquest of Moscow, instead of leading to the capitulation of the Russians, according to the ‘principle’ by which the fall of any capital was decisive, instead lead to the demise of the great general? And why did Napoleon, this *genius* of war, fail at the Battle of Waterloo, despite having applied, almost word for word the prescriptions of perfected ‘principles’ regarding attacking key points and operating from internal lines?

The relationship between the ‘genius’ and ‘principles’ was in fact a central sophism that allowed Enlightenment war theory to support its claims regarding perfection in method. Since the two concepts were inherently fixed and immutable, but reciprocal by definition, when good or right principles failed, one could blame the lack of genius in how these were applied, and when bad or wrong principles succeeded, one could credit the genius of the general who made them work nonetheless, against nature. In either case, the two absolute concepts sustained one another thanks to the sophistry that linked them, coupled with an underlying expectation regarding the scientific method, the existence of principles and the validity of using the former to generate the latter. So long as the scientific method as an approach to the military arts went unquestioned in its fundamentals, this relationship between genius and principles was enough to justify failure and success, but when the revolutionary wars struck, their intensity overwhelmed war theory in way that even this old stopgap, this easy solution to counter any scepticism, proved insufficient.

It is easy to say, looking back, that Napoleon failed at Waterloo despite his genius, and despite the principles regarding key points and internal lines, because of many other aspects of the battle: he was heavily outnumbered and he was forced into a battle rather than having the opportunity to fight at a time and place that would have been more advantageous. Similarly, the Russian expedition failed, despite the

principle of capturing a capital, because his enemy simply *decided* not to concede. If the context can drive the principle, then the principle is only valid insofar as it is being applied at the right place at the right time, which means it neither universal nor absolute. Napoleon's rise and fall had brought to light the fact that 'truths' found in the various doctrines of war were only as powerful as the ink and paper upon which they had been decreed in the first place. From this angle, it was unnecessary to claim that Frederick the Great possessed such thing as a 'perfected' military art. In fact, in debates which pitted highly divergent views on Frederick the Great's strategy by Delbrück and Wilhelmine military writers, whether it rested on war of attrition or acts of desperation, one consensus did emerge, that the 'execution of his strategy was far from perfect'.<sup>69</sup> Rather, Frederick had likely developed some relative gains in discipline and efficiency which gave Prussia a competitive advantage in warfare, compounded by the rise of Berlin as a European political, cultural and economic centre, as well a high level of conscription in the male population. There was nothing magical to any of it. There was no higher power residing in these principles which accorded them any inherent certainty.

This was the great realization. But what it *doesn't clarify* is: Why did war theorists come to believe that absolute principles were possible in the first place? There had to be some underlying expectations regarding validity and certainty in the way theorists were conceiving military thought. The first part of this answer can be found in Delbrück's *History of the Art of War*, where he notes that during this time, 'it was believed that one could turn completely away from the decision by battle, and the method of pure manoeuvre was developed.'<sup>70</sup> This first degree of separation or

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<sup>69</sup> Antulio J. Ecchevaria II, *After Clausewitz, German Military Thinkers Before the Great War*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), p. 184

<sup>70</sup> Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, (London : Greenwood Press, 1985), p. 387

isolation and elevation of a single aspect of war simplified the possibility of generating principles, since it cleared the field, so to speak: it eliminated the dynamic element itself, the soldiers using their weapons, focusing instead on fixed values such as terrain, geography, angles, and the predictable speed and movements of armies that are not in battle. The idea that a war could be won merely on manoeuvre changed the focus of war theory, making it more in line as well with the risk-aversion of princes and kings who sought relative gains in strength and holdings, rather than significant socio-political change. Delbrück notes that in the army regulations of the Elector of Saxony in 1752, it was written that, ‘A battle is the most important and most dangerous operation of war. In open country without a fortress the loss of a battle can be so decisive that it is seldom to be risked and never to be recommended. The masterpiece of a great general is to achieve the final purpose of a campaign by alert and safe manoeuvres without danger.’<sup>71</sup>

The solution to this problem is in no way simple. Understanding how the validity expectations of scientific inquiry could be, and had been, transferred from the natural sciences (i.e. physics, mathematics, etc.) into other areas of human understanding, such as the social sciences, the military arts and philosophy, represents in general terms the overall intellectual context of the Enlightenment period. If the breakdown in Enlightenment war theory can be described as the rise in a new form of scepticism, one which dug to the very core of methodology, and one which could not be suppressed simply by balancing genius against principle, it was only made possible because some legwork had already taken place towards this deep form of scepticism in philosophical world, from which Clausewitz would borrow.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 315

In Part I, for which I am greatly indebted to the thorough research of Azar Gat in *A History of Military Thought*, I explore a dimension which Gat himself accepts was outside the scope of his own research and which he only ‘roughly outline[d]’<sup>72</sup>: to study in greater detail the intellectual context and the philosophical, rather than the purely historical aspects which gave rise to Enlightenment and German Idealist treatises on war. To be sure, I have no intention here to go so far as to claim that the military writers were all busying themselves reading philosophy books. Though some might have done so, it is not in the purview of this text to explore each author line by line to make the point that direct philosophical influences are to be found or not. A positive or negative answer to this question would not change in any way the similarities. Arguably, it was the overall culture itself which was infused with science and certainty, and which explains the parallel development in both fields. It is the counterargument that matters: regardless of why these theories were written this way, the fact that they were allowed Clausewitz to borrow a set of philosophical arguments, conceived as a reply to the metaphysics directly in his case against the Enlightenment military thinkers.

Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that studies the non-physical world and the human capacity to have knowledge of it. Suggesting that it would have any bearing on war theory may at first seem like quite a tenuous and unlikely argument. How can the quests for the scientific proof of God’s existence, interrogations regarding the possibility of supernatural events, and introspection into the form, immortality and indissolubility of the soul apply to the dramatic, real-life enquiries into the military arts? It is not so much the topics at hand as the type of arguments and methodologies, which provide the link. Specifically, as of the moment war theorists

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<sup>72</sup> Azar Gat. *A History of Military Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 28



broke away from the materiality of proclaiming maxims and best practices in war, and seeking instead fundamental, objective and immutable ‘principles of war’, they replicated the formula of the metaphysicians, in their quest for proving and defining the spiritual and the immaterial. It was this overlap, which allowed Clausewitz to juxtapose the methods of refutation found in the field of metaphysics, applying them to his refutation of the scientific principles of war, which he referred to as ‘positive doctrines.’

If Clausewitz’s dialectics of war emerged as the synthesis of the metaphysical debates pitting Kant and Hume against Berkeley and Descartes, and the breakdown in military theory which the Revolutionary Wars had wrought, this however, was not achieved as a single process, but in two separate *moments* of development. In a *first moment* the dialectics of war were a negation, a refutation of the Enlightenment’s ‘positive doctrines’ on the strategic/tactical plane of analysis or a reply to the question, ‘how is war to be fought?’ In this case the movement away from the metaphysical was with regard to methodology and validity expectations.

The *second moment* in the development of Clausewitz’s dialectical war theory takes shape as a result of the first. As was mentioned earlier, the chessboard of warfare, the rules of the game, having apparently been tossed out during the Revolutionary Wars, the first impact of this was to question our preconceived notions of how wars are fought, but eventually this also begged the question, what are the true rules of the game, if what was taken for granted no longer applies? This second moment is less about methods and systems, and more about understanding war’s nature. A question which had until then been relegated to the metaphysical, whether god’s will or punishment, or else human nature: something simple, unitary, taken for granted, and unchangeable. However, upon closer and more systematic scrutiny,

Clausewitz would consider war's paradoxical 'real' and the 'absolute' forms, and this would lead him to an objective observation of war's political nature, which meant that war was not in fact fixed according to some divine or natural law, but dualistic, dynamic and changing. As such, this second moment focused on a higher level of analysis, which moves us from the 'how' in war to the 'what is war' also represented a breakaway from the traditional deistic or naturalists assumptions regarding war's nature, its causes, etc.

Kant is central to the development of both of these dialectical moments in Clausewitz's thinking, however, this should not be taken to mean that other influences on Clausewitz are somehow relegated to an inferior role. Kant's method did not undermine in any way Clausewitz's attachment to Scharnhorst, Fichte, Machiavelli, and Montesquieu. None were excluded in the process of integrating Kant. In fact, they were arguably enhanced as a result. The method allowed him to clarify, amplify, substantiate, and *objectively* demonstrate through a sceptical and critical analysis, what he already come to hold as intuitively true, based on a wide range of readings.

In order to show the methodological links between metaphysics and the art of war, before and after the Kantian revolution in thinking, Part I is divided into four chapters. The first provides an overall philosophical context regarding the fields of Enlightenment metaphysics and war theory, showing their methodological similarities and their common premises regarding the nature and scope of what science could provide human understanding. The second chapter presents the sceptical counterpoise to these methodologies and expectations, which first appears in Hume and is later developed in Kant, making the argument that it forms the backdrop of Clausewitz's 'first dialectical moment' in which he challenges not merely individual positive doctrines or principles of war from Enlightenment war theorists, but actually crushes

the very principle of seeking out and positing principles of war in the first place. Chapter 3 breaks slightly away from the narrative in order to nail the coffin shut on positive doctrines. Here, we consider how 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century military thinkers who tried to undermine Clausewitz's conclusions on positive doctrines generated severe forms of illogic in the process. Combined, chapter 2 & 3 attempt to show exactly what Clausewitz's dialectical method destroyed in its path, what weeds were pulled from the field. And finally, the fourth chapter returns once again to the relationship between Kant and Clausewitz in order to consider what the dialectics of war actually *created*: the dual-concept of 'absolute war' / 'real war'. This is the 'second dialectical moment', in which the method bears fruit.

The overview of the metaphysical debates will be limited to only the successive works of Descartes, Berkeley, Hume and Kant. Evidently, choosing such a narrow set of philosophers in order to discuss the wide field of metaphysics is a conscious editorial decision to sacrifice exhaustiveness for the sake of expediency. Indeed, we must return as quickly as possible to the question of war theory, more specifically, how Clausewitz represented a culminating point, the coming together of the military and metaphysical enquiries. Using these four philosophers nonetheless provides the basics: first, the origins of the method in Descartes, second, the fulfilment or apogee of its claims in Berkeley, followed by counterbalancing appearance of scepticism and limits in Hume representing a certain end, and ultimately, the achievement of a new and distinct plateau of analysis in Kant's system of categories, representing a new beginning. This leaves out much, but nonetheless sheds a reasonable light upon the central themes and questions of this important philosophical journey.

For similar reasons, the theorists chosen to represent Enlightenment thinking on war do not form an exhaustive list either, but certainly represent among the best known and most widely read in the tradition: Montecuccoli, Quincy, de Saxe, Puységur, Maizeroy, Prince de Ligne, Guibert, Bulow, Jomini. Chosen first and foremost because they were among the theorists which Clausewitz himself had read (with the possible exception of Quincy and Maizeroy, who do not appear in Clausewitz's notes.)<sup>73</sup>, another consideration was to match and distinguish theorists who wrote concurrently, as well as to showcase the evolution in the cleavages which marked earlier rationalism from later rationalism in the theories themselves, showing a progression over time from a more nuanced debate on the principles of war, to a black and white opposition between those who held ambitious, all-encompassing positive doctrines in the highest regard, and those who mocked these as pure folly.

As we explore how and why Clausewitz first introduced dialectics into war theory, and later developed it further from one chapter to the next over time, we eventually find ourselves face to face with the problem he would eventually come across. The more clearly defined and mutually exclusive his categories and dichotomies became, the more the system was overtaking what had previously been written. When he wrote his final editorial note, after having completed writing Books VII & VIII, he had come to realize that he would need to reedit the entirety of Books I to VI in order to integrate what he had recently written.<sup>74</sup> It suggests that the more Clausewitz began making a profound use of dialectics, that is, beginning at the end of Book VI and into Books VII and VIII, the more overwhelming its effects on the rest of the project. In writing Book VIII, Clausewitz quipped, 'A small jump is easier than a large one, but no one on that account, wishing to cross a wide ditch, would jump

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<sup>73</sup> Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 81n

<sup>74</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Notice, p. XXXVIII

half of it first.’<sup>75</sup> In this case, we might wonder if there was not some personal truth to this line. When he had started *On War*, Clausewitz had in fact jumped halfway into dialectics, not knowing the full scope of where its chasms would eventually land him by the end of the book. And now that he had water up to his neck in dialectics and was making plans to start all the way back from Chapter One, Book I – maybe he was in fact feeling a bit overwhelmed by the consequences of jumping halfway in.

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<sup>75</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch 4, p. 666

# Chapter One – Perfection and Certainty in Metaphysics and War Theory

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If Clausewitz's preliminary use of dialectical reasoning is found, not in what his theory posited, but in what it negated or refuted, then we should therefore begin our exploration by looking at the Enlightenment theories of war which were the subject of Clausewitz's reply. In this first chapter, the objective is to draw a parallel between the metaphysical philosophy found in Descartes and Berkeley and the form of theorizing which existed amongst war theorists. Despite their different subjects of inquiry, the relationship between science and reason as it was conceived during the Enlightenment was nonetheless identical in both fields. Without this parallel, it would have been impossible for Clausewitz to make such good use of Kant's reaction to the metaphysicians in his own reply to the military theorists. However, before we can engage in this larger question, we must ask ourselves: what were these grand proclamations with regard to God, miracles, angels, strategy, and tactics, and in what sense did they overlap?

The two fields shared a common starting point in wanting to elucidate what makes cosmos out of chaos, which was assumed in both cases to be some external form of intelligence rather than some inherent logic to the thing itself or simply a chaos that is naturally chaotic. Unlike phenomenology, for example, which posits

existence as essence, rationalist philosophy starts with the expectation that existence must emerge causally from essence. It is from this initial premise that the Rationalists and Empiricists sought God by observing that which He created, the effect to His cause. Similarly military theorists sought this external intelligence as it might appear through observation of the causes and effects that linked factors of war together, whether combat to victory, terrain to superiority, or angle to advantage, etc. And so, just as the metaphysicians Descartes and Berkeley were looking for order in the apparent chaos of the universe and the logic that made it intelligible in its creation, so too would military writers from Montecuccoli to Jomini claim that one could synthesize order from the apparent chaos of warfare.

In either case, an aesthetic of perfection surrounded the project and its methodology, and the higher knowledge sought was assumed to exist, simply requiring of intellectual explorers that they should find or discover it, like America or the curvature of the Earth, etc. And secondly, the method for discovering it would be, as in the natural sciences, to remove layers of confusion that surrounded the isolated question: what are the true, immutable, and eternal causes of victory. Causality appeared to these explorers as a concept or thing external to the human mind and therefore possessed by some higher intelligence or ordering idea to the material world. For the metaphysician, the form of external knowledge was an omnipotent and eternal God; while for war theorists, it took the form of an omnipotent and eternal set of principles of war, theories whereby such things as ‘decisive points’, ‘the key to a country’, and ‘base lines’, among many other simple concepts, were assumed to have universal and absolute power to generate victory in war, regardless of the overall context. This was only tenable so long as the ‘decisive’, ‘key’ or ‘base’ idea represented by the expectation that causality was a form of absolute truth in itself held

strong; but should it begin to waiver, the whole edifice that linked certainty to causal inductions and deductions would crumble in metaphysics and war theory alike.

War theorists and metaphysicians failed to see the problem of validity they were creating all-round, by which they reached a single impasse, though for opposite reasons. On the one hand, the metaphysicians could not prove their conclusions intuitively, because these were all based on immaterial concepts that could not be materialized for proper testing or validation. Meanwhile, the war theorists also met up with the problem of never achieving intuitive certainty, not because they lacked material proof, but as a result of the sheer surplus of it. For each example of where one principle had succeeded, history could provide a number of counter-examples of where it had failed, and this provided content enough to encourage debate amongst war theorists. The fact that one could make arguments for and against each and every principle of war stimulated the quest in the first place because it encouraged the expectation that these eternal truths were out there, just waiting to be uncovered.

### Early Enlightenment War Theorists: The Quest for Principles Begins

Our first clue into the nature of Enlightenment thinking in general, and more specifically in the military arts is to break down the meaning of this word ‘principle’ which appeared to be so central to the purposes of the theorists. Making its early appearances in the early 1600s, it would soon spread across the field of war theory, both in terms of the scope of what it represented or what it could mean, and in the overall number of references to the word which we find in the later years of the Enlightenment.



‘Principle’ is by no means an insignificant little word. Its claim to fame is none other than being the Bible’s opening word, a word that invokes the divine power of creation. Whereas in English, we are familiar with the phrase ‘In the beginning’ from the King James translation of Genesis, the word choice loses the flavour which it has in St-Jerome’s Latin translation, the Vulgate, which reads ‘In *principio*’. Etymologically, the word ‘principle’ is from the Latin root ‘princeps’, sharing its etymology with the word ‘prince’, whereby the first syllable ‘prin’ or ‘primus’ means ‘that which is first’, and the second comes from ‘capere’, meaning ‘to take’.<sup>76</sup> Together, they represent the idea of that which is ‘first’ in the sense of ‘original’, as well as the power which the origin bestows. Hence, the word principle implies causality in two mutually enhancing ways, first it brings forth the notion of *Causa Prima*, or creation as consequence of a divine act, and secondly, the very formulation of the concept is a causal idea, where an idea has power *because* it is original or first. There is a certain self-contained logic that binds principle to causality, and both to the divine. That is to say that causality might be unearthed by human inquiry, but it exists outside of the human mind as an absolute form of truth.

As such, ‘principle’ is distinct in its connotation from other synonyms that we use in various theories. ‘Groundings’ and ‘fundamentals’ imply their stability from being fixed from below. They have an earthly origin, or as the French say, ‘terre à terre’ or ‘down to earth’ which is closer in meaning to ‘common sense’ or that which is ‘firmly’ established. Meanwhile, ‘maxims’ can be translated from the Latin as ‘big’ idea or the ‘big’ picture. ‘Adages’ and ‘Theory’ are distinctly human in their connotation, the former derived from ‘speaking’ and the latter from ‘seeing’. Only the

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<sup>76</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prince> & <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/principle>

word ‘principle’ implies a powerful, absolute truth, derived from the primordial nature of things and of God.

In the natural sciences, this spiritual connotation was reinforced by the fact that uncovering causality in the physical properties of objects generated formulae that had the power to predict events in the material world, thereby fulfilling the premise that causality was providing a glimpse into God’s creation and the laws which govern it. However, it was not so clear that this same power of prediction and understanding could in fact take proper form outside physics, mathematics, and geometry. But that did not stop the metaphysicians and war theorists from dreaming up ways to deploy physics, mathematics, and geometry into their respective fields. In fact, the most colourful example of this in war theory was to be found in Dietrich von Bülow’s *Kriegssystem*, in which he went so far as borrowing directly the theory of gravity to describe the agency of military energies with mathematical certainty, arguing that they become weaker in ‘an inverse ratio of the square of its distance.’<sup>77</sup> Yet, this extreme form of scientific theorizing would only come later in the game. Before such precise principles could be expounded, the question which was on the minds of war theorists was whether or not principles of war were even possible in the first place. In fact, among early Enlightenment war theorists, the word principle was avoided. The word itself was not associated to dictates of tactics and strategy, but to questions regarding how such a universal theory might eventually form through systematized inquiry. There was hope and confidence in the method, but there was not yet a sense of having achieved this end.

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<sup>77</sup> Bülow, Dietrich von. *Esprit du system de la guerre moderne*  
[http://www.stratisc.org/partenaires/cfhm/micro/Von\\_Bülow\\_Section10.html](http://www.stratisc.org/partenaires/cfhm/micro/Von_Bülow_Section10.html)

The Enlightenment's quest for principles of war progressed vigorously, fuelled by growing literacy and access to printing presses, two defining characteristics of the time. While the 17<sup>th</sup> century had produced some 70 publications on the subject of the military arts, a century later the rate of publication had increased four-fold.<sup>78</sup> Among these works, the two schools of thought had reached an irreconcilable distance from one another: on the one side, the principles of war were becoming more precise and grandiose, while on the other, a few counter-current authors pressed harder and used harsher criticism in questioning the claims to absolute certainty.

To find the origin or the foundations of the quest for principles, we must go back to the early and mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, a time when Galileo and Descartes were publishing their works. Raimondo Montecuccoli was among the first to embark upon the quest for organizing a systematized and scientific study of war. Writing in roughly the same years, Montecuccoli did not generally use the word 'principle'. However, the methodology he proposed framed war in the necessary didactical frame, upon which would emerge the formulation of principles. Using a tight set of calculations, measures, concepts and subdivisions, Montecuccoli flirted with narrower and more systematic notions, while never actually expounding principles. Interestingly, while the title of his major work was 'Dell'Arte militare', which he wrote between 1649 and 1654, a French translation in 1734 would insert the word principle into the title, changing it from The Military Arts to 'Principes de l'art militaire,' or 'Principles of Military Art'; a rather evident demonstration of just how central word principle had

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<sup>78</sup> Cited by Azar Gat in A History of Military Thought, p. 25. J. Pöhler, Bibliotheca Historico-militaris (Leipzig, 1887-1897)

become in the field of war between the time the manuscript was originally written and when the French translation came about.<sup>79</sup>

Montecuccoli's work set the foundations for a systematized study of war by introducing a smaller set of ideas, which aligned key items to one single, ultimate goal: victory. Of course, this may appear trivial from a modern perspective, but as Moran explains, this 'seemingly unexceptional claim' was a challenging idea 'because it elevated an illusive military abstraction above traditionally, socially defined concerns with honour, glory, plunder and prestige.'<sup>80</sup> Montecuccoli was giving war theory a far keener intellectual shape, which involved the relationship between ends and means, as well as a reduced framework for analyzing and achieving 'victory,' which in fact depended on one's mastery over each element in a set of only three categories of actions.

La guerra è un'azione di eserciti offendentisi in ogni guisa, il cui fine si è la vittoria.<sup>81</sup> [War is an action of armies which clash between themselves in every way, and for which the end goal is victory.]

La vittoria si consegue per mezzo dell'apparecchio, della disposizione e dell'operazione.<sup>82</sup> [Victory follows by means of preparations, dispositions and operations.]

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<sup>79</sup> Raimondo Montecuccoli, *Memoires de Montecuccoli : ou Principes de l'art militaire en général* (Amsterdam : 1734)

<sup>80</sup> Daniel Moran. 'Strategic Theory and the History of War', in Baylis et al. *Strategy in the Contemporary World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 21.

<sup>81</sup> Raimondo Montecuccoli. *Opere*, 2nd ed. (Milano: Giovanni Silvestri, 1831) p. 81

<sup>82</sup> Idem.

Despite the fact that this formulation at first appears to have absolute claims, when one proceeds to the description of these aspects of war, it becomes evident that their parts consist of variables, not immutable maxims. To give an example, regarding ‘Dispositions’ Montecuccoli explains that one must: ‘1) consult slowly, execute with speed. [...] 3) accept the role of chance. [...] 4) take profit from unforeseen situations [...] 6) remember that one who thinks of everything does nothing, and one who thinks of nothing succumbs to error.’<sup>83</sup> These are not the words of a person who would profess an absolute faith in the power of science or geometry to overwhelm or undermine the uncertainties of war. Rather, Montecuccoli embraced these uncertainties and looked to enlightened leadership to profit from them.

Well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this was generally the case. The word ‘principle’ had still not yet made complete headway into the field of military arts, even though certain scientific principles were finding their way through. The relationship between science, method and the military arts were becoming tenser, but the latter had not yet been overtaken by the former two. Marquis de Quincy, writing in 1728, systematically avoided the use of the word ‘principle’ and rather spoke of ‘maxims,’ ‘art,’ and ‘tactics’ to make his arguments. Given that the term was known to the military arts and widely used in other fields of study by that time, this avoidance was without a doubt a conscious decision. That being said, there was an appreciation for what science could afford the general, but only in a subservient role. In his book, *L'Art de la guerre: ou instructions sur l'art militaire*, Quincy allowed for a co-

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<sup>83</sup> Raimondo Montecuccoli. *Memoires de Montecuccoli : ou Principes de l'art militaire en général* (Amsterdam : 1734), p 62 [my translation to English]

existence between the art of leadership and adaptation to situations, and certain geometrical and mathematical imperatives of the type of warfare being fought at the time, given its lines and fortifications. And so, far from dismissing science as a tool in the quest for improving war's outcomes and techniques, Quincy effectively applied scientific models to specific features of war, but made no claim to apply them as an ontological whole or a model by which all of war's many intricacies could be understood. Thus, in his introductory comments, Quincy placed the subject of Geometry among the four intellectual disciplines in which a General must excel in order to succeed in the battlefield. He offered a compelling example of why that is later in his treatise, in his exploration of the difficulty involved in aiming one's guns from afar at the right angle required to strike through the embrasures in the fortifications behind which soldiers shot at the approaching army:

I have seen otherwise very competent officers fall into this trap, for having marked the terrain at night. One must take measures, in order to be precisely parallel to that which he seeks to attack. Without this, he weakens his ability to clear the embrasures on the side we are firing at, and we find it difficult to undo such a disadvantage, which may cause a considerable delay.<sup>84</sup>

Yet, far from turning these questions of angles into foolproof systems of conduct, Quincy also included moral factors in the way troops were to be led to victory, emphasizing such things as recompense, glory, leadership and inspiration:

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<sup>84</sup> M. le Marquis de Quincy, *L'Art de la guerre* (The Hague : Henri Scheurleer, 1728), pp. 193-194

[One must] unite all the forces, and examine the advantages of terrain, the wind, the sun and choose a field which will accommodate size of one's troops, [...] and through strong speeches, showing one's countenance, firmness, tranquillity and assurance, inspiring the strength of one's army, and showing them their certainty of victory and reminding them of their duty, the necessity, the glory, the booty, the recompenses, and coming end of their fatigue, so that they may recall the great actions they have accomplished in the past.<sup>85</sup>

In the case of Maurice de Saxe, writing in roughly the same years, 1732 to be precise, the relationship between principles and the art of war was a somewhat confused one. In the introduction to his *Reveries*, he clearly states that 'All sciences have principles and rules. War has none.'<sup>86</sup> From this categorical stance, he manages to pursue an argument that leads him, in the final chapters, to spell out his own set of 'principles'. This inconsistency however, he would probably reply, was likely caused by the feverish disposition he was in when he wrote the book in the first place,<sup>87</sup> but it is nonetheless telling that this paradox should appear in the years in which it did, right before the quest for absolute principles of war truly took off.

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the care that went into managing the paradox or uncertainties of principles and the military arts ceased. There were, on the one side, people like Prince Charles-Joseph de Ligne, a Field Marshal under the Holy Roman

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<sup>85</sup> Quincy. *L'Art de la guerre*, pp. 199-200

<sup>86</sup> Maurice de Saxe, *Reveries on the Art of War* (Harrisburg: Military Service Publishing, 1944), p. 17

<sup>87</sup> Saxe, *Reveries on the Art of War*, epigraph

Empire, who were categorical their anti- 'principles' stance. De Ligne argued that the infinity of situations in war negates the very possibility of principles. 'My fundamental principle in war is to not have any principles. [...] Are any two situations perfectly identical? It is so of combat like of faces, when two are alike, that is already quite a lot.'<sup>88</sup> On the other side stood Guibert, Puységur, Maizeroy, Bülow, and Jomini, whose works we shall consider further below, who reveled in all kinds of mathematical and scientific generalizations and systematization on war. What separates the early Enlightenment from the five I have enumerated is precisely this willingness to accept uncertainty in their theorizing, moving away from Quincy's moderation, through Saxe admitting the paradox, and onwards to the final *gravitations* of Bülow.

While we can easily see how optimism in the sciences might have contributed to this, what is missing from analysis is the jump from 'scientific inspiration' to 'scientific certainty'. Among the early Enlightenment war theorists, there is no doubt that 'causal' inferences were at the centre of all their theorizing: the induction of principles was based on the premise that isolation and observation caused principles to emerge; and reciprocally, once such principles were found, should they be found, they would permit the deduction of logical stratagems based on the premise that applying a principle to a situation causes a series of effects that would generate the conditions of victory. We find that there was a confidence in the premises and the method involved in generating and using principles of war, but in exchange there remained some flexibility and perhaps uncertainty about the nature and form such principles would take. To understand where this specific point in war theorizing is analogous to the metaphysics, we must turn to Descartes. He also had developed a

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<sup>88</sup> Prince de Ligne, *Fantaisies militaires*, p. 188 (cited in Coutau-Bégarie, *Traité de stratégie*, p 279)



total confidence in the method, which he would use to uncover the truth about God, and he concluded that one could know scientifically that God existed, though he had not gone so far as trying to extrapolate the form and substance this God would take, the details behind the veil.

### Descartes: A Scientific Approach to the Immaterial

The year was 1641. The Church had suffered many setbacks to its official dogma, from Columbus to Magellan, and Copernicus to Galileo. Science was on the rise, but luckily for the Church, science's interest in *demonstrating* God was not fuelled by questions of atheism, but rather an interest in heresy, in improving our knowledge of the divine.<sup>89</sup> Such questions had been studied before, and the arguments on the topic made by Saint Anselm of Canterbury almost 600 years earlier resurfaced in Rene Descartes' proof of God's existence, as a deductive argument starting with God's perfection.<sup>90</sup> Descartes also followed in Saint Thomas of Aquinas' footsteps in suggesting that God's existence cannot be derived in and of itself, but must result from our experience of His effects becoming manifest to us.<sup>91</sup> What was truly original in Descartes' was not so much the conclusion or even the argumentative path he used to get there, but rather the method itself, given that Descartes was not a trained theologian or philosopher; he was a mathematician and physicist cum philosopher. Consequently, Descartes' approach to the question was grounded in the scientific method.

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<sup>89</sup> Stephen Gaukroger. *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes' Meditations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 4

<sup>90</sup> Jean-Marie Vaysse, *La stratégie critique de Kant*, (Paris: Ellipses, 2005), p. 10

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11

From this perspective, Descartes could use the systems of logic which he had developed in his geometry work, because he was making the assumption that even though objects were not necessarily numbers and figures, they could nonetheless be analysed as if they were. As a result of this assumption, he could make use of ‘long chains of reasoning,’ like those which geometricians used in their demonstrations.<sup>92</sup> As a result, his *Meditations* made use of methods directly borrowed from the sciences, particularly the isolation of variables, and the deduction through sequential causal arguments meant to allow a logical and scientific conclusion to emerge from the deductive process.

By interposing science into his system of philosophy, Descartes hoped that he would re-establish a firm foundation by which to rectify his beliefs and opinions:

Several years have now elapsed since I first became aware that I had accepted, even from my youth, many false opinions for true, and that consequently what I afterward based on such principles was highly doubtful; I was convinced of the necessity of undertaking once in my life to rid myself of all the opinions I had adopted, and of commencing anew the work of building from the foundation, if I desired to establish a firm and abiding superstructure in the sciences.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Etienne Gilson and Thomas Langan, *A History of Philosophy, Modern Philosophy From Descartes to Kant*, (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 57

<sup>93</sup> René Descartes. *Meditations and Selections from The Principles, First Meditation*, Tr. John Veitch (Chicago: Open Court, 1903), p. 21

Paradoxically, the starting point of the new certitude that would emerge from this process was in fact an extreme form of doubt, however as far as scepticisms go, this particular form is closer to a rhetorical ploy than to any sincere objective to generate a sceptical theory or method. Its purpose in the First Meditation was to generate an ‘intense sceptical doubt’ not as a way of life or philosophy, as the ancient sceptics would have, but rather as a tool of abstraction, a radical doubt which is not meant to be practical, but which was nonetheless useful to the purpose of his treatise.<sup>94</sup> The argument begins by questioning perceptual information, which can deceive the perceiver both in dreams and our waking hours. While this argument can be traced back to those of the Ancients, what followed was an original form of doubt: the assumption, for the sake of the inquiry, that God is not the source of all truth, but rather a ‘malignant demon, who is at once exceedingly potent and deceitful, [and who] has employed all his artifice to deceive me.’<sup>95</sup> In this hypothetical context, everything in the universe, as perceived by the human mind is false.

Having established this absolute sense of doubt, Descartes was thereby free to focus on the self, in this fullest abandonment from the world. He could then conclude that even within this ultimate doubt, there existed a beacon of certainty, and this would become his famous maxim: ‘cogito ergo sum’.

But there is I know not what being, who is possessed at once of the highest power and the deepest cunning, who is constantly employing all his ingenuity in deceiving me. Doubtless, then, I exist, since I am deceived; and, let him deceive me as he may, he can never bring it about

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<sup>94</sup> Gaukroger. *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes' Meditations*, p. 2

<sup>95</sup> Descartes. *Meditations and Selections from The Principles, First Meditation*, p. 27

that I am nothing, so long as I shall be conscious that I am something. So that it must, in fine, be maintained, all things being maturely and carefully considered, that this I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time it is expressed by me, or conceived in my mind.<sup>96</sup>

If we recall our earlier discussion of ‘principles’, we are reminded of the power of a truth that comes from the origin, or the fundament. Descartes ‘Cogito’ takes this form because it exists in and of itself, it does not depend on some other truth. The Cogito was a causal relation even purer and truer than even the *Causa Prima* itself! Descartes would go so far as to refer to it as the ‘first principle of philosophy,’<sup>97</sup> dethroning in the process even God as the centrality of philosophical inquiry. Yet it rests on something that is even more fundamental, though the philosopher had not recognized it. The ‘Cogito ergo sum’ rests its conclusion on a causal inference, where ‘thinking’ is a demonstration of ‘being’. It is upon this first, elementary causation that the philosopher builds up the rest of his exploration of the divine.

In the Third Meditation, Descartes proceeded to call into question the existence of his ‘malignant demon’, arguing that it would be wrong to assume that God is a deceiver before having even considered the larger question of whether God actually exists or not.<sup>98</sup> Having asked us to put aside the hypothetical construction which allowed the cogito in the first place, he reconsiders the existence of God in

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<sup>96</sup> Descartes, *Meditations and Selections from The Principles, Second Meditation*, p. 30

<sup>97</sup> Richard W. Peltz. ‘The Logic of the Cogito’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1962) p. 257

<sup>98</sup> Descartes. *Meditations and Selections from The Principles, Third Meditation*, pp. 44-45

relation to the Cogito, and thereby sets his new starting ground and basis for a new system of certainty.

[...] since I am a thinking thing and possess in myself an idea of God, whatever in the end be the cause of my existence, it must of necessity be admitted that it is likewise a thinking being, and that it possesses in itself the idea and all the perfections I attribute to Deity. Then it may again be inquired whether this cause owes its origin and existence to itself, or to some other cause. For if it be self-existent, it follows, from what I have before laid down, that this cause is God.<sup>99</sup>

[...]

[...]and thus there can here be no difficulty with respect to them, and it is absolutely necessary to conclude from this alone that I am, and possess the idea of a being absolutely perfect, that is, of God, that his existence is most clearly demonstrated.<sup>100</sup>

The line of reasoning which links Descartes' absolute doubt to his discovery of God is generally referred to by scholars as the Cartesian circle, because 'the criterion of clear and distinct perception depends on the assumption that God exists, which in turn depends on the criterion of clear and distinct perception.'<sup>101</sup> It generated in metaphysics a doctrine of knowledge independent of any metaphysical guarantee or

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<sup>99</sup> Descartes. *Meditations and Selections from The Principles, Third Meditation*, p. 59

<sup>100</sup> Descartes. *Meditations and Selections from The Principles, Third Meditation*, pp. 60-61

<sup>101</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/97302/Cartesian-circle>

proof.’<sup>102</sup> Method had in effect been elevated to the point where it had generated its very own sense of self-certainty, upon which Enlightenment thinking would thereafter rest.

If we look back now on the early Enlightenment war theorists, we find that there is a parallel situation with regard to the interrogation on the existence of principles. Montecucoli was not seeking out principles, because the time for it had not yet arrived; this was still in the phase of asking whether or not principles could even exist in the first place. First, the premises for their emergence needed to be set, the foundations for the coming military arts. This was equally the place of Descartes in history. He was not trying to demonstrate God’s form and substance, but merely asking if one could know of God’s existence with any certainty, to which he replied ‘yes’. It was after these preliminary conclusions that the subsequent quest to unearth the details of God and the principles of war emerged proper.

Yet, it was not until this new set of inquiry had been developed in philosophy that it trickled down into the military arts. During the roughly 100 years that separated Montecucoli from Maurice de Saxe and Quincy, principles remained somewhat of a mystery, where we could imagine the potential for a future military science, but we could not yet assume to possess it fully. Thus the compromise which Quincy sticks with, and the paradox which Saxe develops. There is clear impasse. But a new philosophy was dawning. It would pursue new heights: to study form and substance, the details and depth of our knowledge of the divine, as opposed to merely the yes or no of its existence. And so too will some war theorists soon thereafter take on the quest to uncover the form and substance of principles, while no longer questioning the underlying premise of whether or not they did in fact exist.

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<sup>102</sup> Alan Gewirtz. ‘The Cartesian Circle’, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 50. No. 4 (July 1941), p. 372

## Berkeley: The Form and Substance of God

The impetus to begin questioning Descartes' logic, did not come so much from a reply directed at Descartes, as from those aimed at his disciple Berkeley, who would take the Cartesian method to a whole new level of ambition. His major work *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* was first published in 1710, and in it, he developed a far more ambitious demonstration of God. It is worth noting that the title takes on the word 'principle' which should not come as a surprise, given its scope to go beyond mere methodology and into the measurement of divine attributes. Berkeley did not make use only of the scientific method, but added to this scientific analogy and terminology, a modification and enhancement to the approach, we shall soon see, which equally occurred in the field of war theory.

Berkeley's system has been described as 'the most consistent development of Descartes' fundamental thesis of the priority of self- consciousness, coupled with a theistic conception of God and a subordination of mechanistic physics to idealistic metaphysics.'<sup>103</sup> And indeed, the Cartesian influence on Berkeley was considerable and in fact easily confirmable thanks to notes Berkeley took in his diary.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, if one takes the time to analyze where he stood on various arguments which had pitted Hobbes against Descartes, Berkeley almost systematically stood in agreement with the latter, against the former.<sup>105</sup> Berkeley adopted the Cartesian project as his own and tried to clarify and improve upon its argumentation in a way

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<sup>103</sup> T.A. Kantonen. 'The Influence of Descartes on Berkeley', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 43, No. 5 (Sep., 1934), pp. 483-500.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

that would allow him to propose more ambitious conclusions, not only on the existence of God, but also the form and substance of the spirit. His purpose was to:

[...]uncover those doctrines or principles which somehow lead to skepticism and atheism. He thinks he can specify which principles have these consequences, an important matter unto itself since these principles were all accepted by one or more of his predecessors. However, Berkeley also wants to refute scepticism and atheism; he claims to vindicate commonsensical views about knowledge and certainty and in the process establish the existence of God, thereby discharging two tasks at one blow.<sup>106</sup>

In the *Treatise*, Berkeley introduced scientific methodology and analogy in a way that Descartes had not. His text did not limit itself to the existence of God, but went further, attempting also to elucidate the substance of divinity, thus integrating concepts from the physical world and the natural sciences, such as indivisibility and indissolubility into his metaphysics.

We have shown that the soul is indivisible, incorporeal, unextended, and it is consequently incorruptible. Nothing can be plainer than the motions, changes, decays, and dissolutions which we hourly see befall natural bodies (and which is what we mean by the course of nature)

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<sup>106</sup> George Pappas. 'Berkeley and Scepticism', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LIX, No. 1 (March 1999)



cannot possibly affect an active, simple, uncompounded substance; such a being therefore is indissoluble by the force of nature; that is to say, the soul of man is naturally immortal. [...]‘Hence, it is evident that God is known as certainly and immediately as any other mind or spirit whatsoever distinct from ourselves. We may even assert that the existence of God is far more evidently perceived than the existence of men; because the effects of nature are infinitely more numerous and considerable than those ascribed to human agents.’<sup>107</sup>

Yet, regardless of the new tools and precision in the exposition, once again, the crux of the argument fell back on the older arguments of Aquinas and Descartes, whereby God’s existence is inherent to the concept of causality, the *Causa Prima*, the explanation for human perception of the natural world.

What is remarkable, when we transfer back to the field of war theory is that its evolution went through the exact same process. Let us recall from the above section on the early Enlightenment war theorists that their purpose was to find principles and to prove that such principles were possible. Like Descartes, they were after the thing itself. The later Enlightenment military thinkers, convinced that they already possessed it, like Berkeley, went on to describe what they already possessed in much greater detail, leaving behind any scepticism regarding the method or the proof or demonstration of its conclusions. The greater the reliance metaphysicians and war theorists put on the ‘certainty’ of causal inferences, the greater their conclusions became to dependent on the validity of this very concept. This therefore meant that

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<sup>107</sup> George Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, in *The Empiricists*, (Toronto: Anchor Books, 1974), pp. 209-212

they were at a high risk of becoming destabilized by anything that might cast doubt on causality itself, and its claims to certitude. Could causality lose its luster as the basis of all human understanding?

## The Later Enlightenment War Theorists: The Form and Substance of Principles

What connects this upcoming section to the preceding one is not that philosophers were becoming war theorists or war theorists were becoming philosophers, but rather that the quest for ‘principles’ of war was in fact taking on a form that was increasingly mystical and metaphysical in its essence. As the principles were *perfected* and broken down into their minute parts, they became increasingly removed from any material reality, and their capacity to be proven empirically was further eclipsed by the ambition to be universally applicable and certain. By the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, the quest had indeed broken with the past, and taken on a path which began with Puységur and Maizeroy and finally culminated in the acclaimed works of Bülow and Jomini.

The first representative of this new generation military theorists was Puységur, who wrote *Art de la guerre par principe et par règle* in 1743. Inspired by the famed French fortifications expert Vauban,<sup>108</sup> Puységur hoped to convey the spatial and geometrical advances in the science of fortification to the art of war in the battlefield.

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<sup>108</sup> Gat, Azar. *A History of Military Thought*, p. 37.

It is indeed no surprise that the initial impetus should come from the art of fortification, because if there was one place in the military arts where formulas and mathematics were essential, this was it. Again, we are reminded of what Quincy had to say about embrasures and angles with regard to this particular form of warfare. Geometry and science could indeed generate very tangible tactical ramifications in this case, but the question remained whether the principles would carry from this fixed environment to the very mobile environment of the open battlefield.

As an interesting side note, however, while one might expect that because of this immobility and constancy, the art of fortifications would have been the most logical place to begin speaking of ‘principles,’ this was actually not the case at all. This does not mean he wasn’t being scientific in his calculations. His improved design on the ‘poudrerie’, the powder magazine, remained the official one in France for the following 200 years, replaced only in 1874.<sup>109</sup> Everything was counted and organized systematically and meticulously, and Vauban was also known to ‘work out sets of tables, which related the garrison, armament and interior space to various numbers of bastions.’<sup>110</sup> And yet, regardless of this, the word ‘principle’ was not on his mind. In his most important text, *La defence des places*,<sup>111</sup> Vauban did not use the term ‘principle’ once, even though he makes very precise observations regarding the methods of fortification. This was clearly a thought out word choice, since Vauban was quite familiar with the term principle and made regular use of it in his political and economic writings, such as in *Les Oisivetés*.<sup>112</sup> Vauban, who died in 1707, wrote in a way that was perfectly in line with that of an early Enlightenment war theorist,

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<sup>109</sup> Christopher Duffy, *The Fortress in the Age of Vauban and Frederick the Great*, (London : Routledge, 1985), p. 74

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p. 74

<sup>111</sup> Vauban, *Les Oisivetés* (Sysse: Champs Valeon, 2007)

<sup>112</sup> Vauban, *Œuvres* (Amsterdam : Arkstee & Merkus, 1771)

even though he would become the inspiration for the principles of the later Enlightenment war theorists.

Puységur best describes what he means by a 'principle' his concept of 'principles' in his discussion entitled, *Comparing Caesar's oblique lines at Pharsalus with those we should have taken at Nordlingen: reflection on the errors we commit for lack of principles*.<sup>113</sup> In it, Puységur explains that principles are the system of analysis, based in geometry, which will automatically lead the general to the best course of action, insofar as the situation has been properly gauged:

Among the methods used in combat by the great Roman and Greek captains, those that were not considered, because they were unknown of, since truth in the science of war (as I have said before) cannot be acquired until practice in armies is the result of theory founded on principles of geometry, which consist of comparing the moving forces which are acting against one another. [...] After having recognized the numbers and the orders of battle of the enemy, this comparison of your forces with his offers your imagination all the different approaches one can take, whether to attack or defend; and once these have been weighed, it will make you choose the best option.<sup>114</sup>

Whereas it is easy to gauge a situation when in attacking or defending a fortress, because the situation is generally unchanging, what is not so clear, and did in

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<sup>113</sup> Puysegur, *L'Art de la guerre par principe et par règles*, Tome 2 (Paris: Charles Antoine Jombert, 1749) p. 379

<sup>114</sup> Puységur, *L'Art de la guerre par principe et par règles*, p. 119-120

fact depend on a great leap of faith, was that the lessons learned from siege warfare could be adapted to battlefields, where angles and motion, everything, was so variable. The pedantry in Puységur seemed to have no limit, through mathematical formulas, for example, he would break down complex, possibly even day-long manoeuvres not to the hour or the minute, but to the precise second.<sup>115</sup>

A few years after Puységur, this direction towards perfection continued to be felt, when Lieutenant-Colonel Joly de Maizeroy work, which had the stated goal to build ‘a theory on the science of war based on solid and invariable principles.’<sup>116</sup> In his treatise entitled *Mémoire sur les opinions qui partagent les militaires*, Maizeroy wrote, ‘We begin with the well-known and invariable principle of combat, which consists of bringing the strong against the weak, vanquishing the enemy’s flank, and turning him – robbing him, as much as possible, of the ability to make movements to this end.’<sup>117</sup> The language of war theory had indeed evolved, away from the uncertainties and exploratory nature found in the works of Montecuccoli or Quincy. Now, in Maizeroy, war’s methods and concepts had acquired a language which posited strategies and tactics that were infallible.

This new faith continued to hold true in the works of General Guibert who wrote *Essai général de tactique* in 1770. In its pages, he complained that military thought had not yet managed to generate the types of scientific truth which physicists and astronomers had discovered in their fields hoped to develop tactics that ‘would constitute a science at every period of time, in every place, and among every species of arms; that is to say, if ever by some revolution among the nature of arms which it is

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<sup>115</sup> Puysegur, *L’Art de la guerre par principe et par règles*, p. 379

<sup>116</sup> Joly de Maizeroy, *Theorie de Guerre*, p. XXIV (cited by Couteau-Bégarie, *Traité sur la stratégie*, p 279)

<sup>117</sup> Joly de Maizeroy, *Memoire sur les opinions qui partage les militaires*, (Paris: Claude Antoine Jombert, 1773), p66

not possible to foresee, the order of depth should again be adapted, there would be no necessity in putting the same [tactics] in practice to change either manoeuvre or constitution.’<sup>118</sup>

Guibert did not mince his words. His science showed no fear. At one point, he would go so far as to claim that he could ‘*perfectly* [my emphasis] develop a theory regarding obliques orders.’<sup>119</sup> Fond of demonstrating things with unquestionable certainty, Guibert was also of the opinion that, ‘surrounded by tumult and danger, in an environment where there are many wrong options and only one good one, this is where ‘coup d’oeil’ shows its wisdom, the judgment that wins battles. [...] The science of ‘coup d’oeil’ and the knowledge of terrain being intimately linked to tactics, we can see how many false and useless illuminations military colleges will give, which will not be constituted on this fundamental principle.’<sup>120</sup>

In his own words, his ‘science’ was to be a set of ‘principles’ whereby he would ‘demonstrate the grand combinations of the interior mechanisms that must be weighed by an army in its transition from marching orders to combat dispositions.’<sup>121</sup> Here the use of the words ‘demonstrate’ and ‘must’ are of interest, because they are categorical. In fact, Guibert prided himself on having proclaimed a ‘perfect theory’, in which his ‘principles’ were meant to be of the ‘dogmatic’ order!<sup>122</sup> Typical of the later Enlightenment war theorists, Guibert had altogether given up on doubting any of his claims.

The word dogmatic is wonderfully ironic in that on the one hand, Guibert was priding himself at having achieved this, but with hindsight one might say exact that:

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<sup>118</sup> Gat. *History of Military Thought*, p. 56

<sup>119</sup> M. le Comte de Guibert. *Essai general de tactique* (Paris: Magimel, 1805), p. 75

<sup>120</sup> Guibert. *Essai general de tactique*, p 245-246

<sup>121</sup> Guibert. *Essai general de tactique*, p. 64

<sup>122</sup> Guibert. *Essai general de tactique*, p. 75

his conclusions were indeed merely dogmatic. It is at this threshold that the parallel between Enlightenment metaphysics and war theory becomes tangible. Their professed certainty stands on a far more unstable ground than what any of these theorists could have expected, from their perspective. Given that method had been elevated, and material proof somewhat relegated to a subservient role, their pretensions were only valid insofar as they could not be properly questioned. Whereas this lack of materiality had as an effect in the metaphysics to render the hypotheses impossible to disprove for lack of material evidence, the opposite occurred in the art of war: there was so much material evidence with contradictory outcomes that no single principle could be elevated to certainty because each rule had a counter-rule, each example had its opposite.

The answer to the riddle or problem of certainty in war theory was everywhere to be found among Enlightenment war theorists, but it seemed a surprisingly unconscious one. In what each of them had to say about the other, they regularly decried one thing in common: a thorough dissatisfaction with what all the preceding theories and principles written by others. Rarely building upon the works of others, they seemed intent on starting from scratch, as though the work of the previous authors had not, in fact, brought us any closer to the goal of finding immutable principles. This trend was best shown in the works of Jomini, as he wrote that even those who had served as his greatest influences and guides early on, Lloyd and Guibert, they had achieved only ‘more or less complete’, ‘imperfect’ and ‘deplorably contradictory’ theories.<sup>123</sup>

The same people who wrote grandiose principles of war were inadvertently agreeing with Prince de Ligne’s argument stating that no true principle of war could

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<sup>123</sup> Antoine de Jomini, *Précis de l’art de la guerre*, (Paris: Anselin, 1838), p. 16

exist, or at least that there had not yet been any (until their own) *better* principles would suddenly shine light upon the Enlightenment's darkness. It was precisely this optimism and lack of scepticism, despite the repetitive incompleteness of the project and the dissatisfaction it wrought, which serves as the parallel we find with the metaphysical project. Here too, the professed certainty of the project was proportional and growing alongside the further application and reliance on the power of the scientific method and its languages and precepts. This explains equally why Berkeley's claims had eclipsed the scope and range of those of his predecessors. But the closer one got to the final truth, the more it became evident that an inherent weakness at the centre, at the first cause, was collapsing on itself.

### The Antinomian Problem

The next chapter will explain in greater detail the nature of the breakdown in Enlightenment thinking, and how the arguments made by Hume and Kant would eventually trickle into Clausewitz's approach to the principles of war. However, it would be useful for us to introduce, before this more substantial discussion, an example of the problem of reason which Clausewitz came across, when he exposed the inescapable weaknesses of the writings of the most ambitious and perhaps also most tragic figure of all Enlightenment military theorists, Bülow.

Bülow's successful piece entitled *Geist der neuern Kriegssystem*, which was briefly mentioned earlier for its discussion of the theory of gravity the movements and forces involved in the battlefield, would become Clausewitz's favorite target for mockery. The main thrust of Bülow's argument, however, was not about forces of



repulsion, attraction, and gravity, but rather the very different subject of bases and lines of operations. Bülow claimed that the need for a regular supply of ammunitions to succeed in war required a geometrically calculable base upon which to rely. Using simplistic geometric formulas, he argued that a right angle triangle represented a critical point or cut-off after which any angle more acute would not allow enough cover to protect the base. Obtuse angles on the other hand offered the added advantage that any attempt by the enemy to incur into the base would leave their own bases undefended. Thus obtuse angles were most advantageous.<sup>124</sup> In his concluding remarks, Bülow argued that beyond the 90 degree cut-off, one could ‘undertake an offensive operation against the enemy with safety.’<sup>125</sup> He also argued that all retreats, in order to be successful, had to be accomplished using exocentric formations.<sup>126</sup> His system excluded the possibility of exceptions or circumstances where these hard rules could not be applied or could be less efficient than alternatives.

With regard to Bülow’s concept of base lines, Clausewitz argued that, ‘as far as history is concerned, we have decidedly not been led to any deductions of that kind through constantly recurring forms’.<sup>127</sup> He then proceeds to explain how different contexts generate different best practices:

What Daun did by the extent and provident choice of positions, the king did by keeping his army always concentrated, always hugging the enemy close, and by being always ready to act extemporally with his

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<sup>124</sup> Von Bülow. *Esprit du system de la guerre moderne*, [http://www.stratisc.org/Von\\_Bülow\\_Section2.html](http://www.stratisc.org/Von_Bülow_Section2.html)

<sup>125</sup> Von Bülow. *Esprit du system de la guerre moderne*, [http://www.stratisc.org/Von\\_Bülow\\_Section14.html](http://www.stratisc.org/Von_Bülow_Section14.html)

<sup>126</sup> *idem*.

<sup>127</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Bk. XI, Ch 30, p. 566

whole army. The method of each general proceeded not only from the nature of the army he commanded, but also from the circumstances in which he was placed.<sup>128</sup>

Similarly, in Book IV, Clausewitz countered Bülow's argument regarding exocentric retreats by providing two examples that were absolutely contrary to the stated rules, which was enough in itself to invalidate the rule's claim to universality:

Now and again it has been suggested (fn. In ref. to Lloyd, Bülow) to divide for the purpose of retreating, therefore to retreat in separate divisions or even eccentrically. [...] The idea of harassing the enemy by separate corps on both flanks at the moment when he is following up his victory, is a perfect anomaly; a faint-hearted pedant might be overawed by his enemy in that manner, and for such a case it may answer; but where we are not sure of this failing in our opponent it is better let alone. If the strategic relations after a battle require that we should cover ourselves right and left by detached corps, so much must be done, as from circumstances is unavoidable, but this fractioning must always be regarded as an evil, and we are seldom in a state to commence it the day after the battle itself.

If Frederick the Great after the battle of Collin, and the raising of the siege of Prague retreated in three columns, that was done not out of

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<sup>128</sup> Idem.

choice, but because the position of his forces, and the necessity of covering Saxony, left him no alternative. Buonaparte after the battle of Brienne, sent Marmont back to the Aube, whilst he himself passed the Seine, and turned towards Troyes; but that this did not end in disaster, was solely owing to the circumstance that the Allies, instead of pursuing, divided their forces in like manner, turned with the one part (Blucher) towards the Marne, while with the other (Schwartzemberg), from fear of being too weak, they advanced with exaggerated caution.<sup>129</sup>

Having demonstrated the opposite stance, Clausewitz was not completely satisfied, nor would he use this to propose an alternative and opposite set of absolute principles replacing one set of doctrines with another. In fact, Clausewitz generally agreed that bases and lines were useful concepts, he simply insisted that one could not derive war plans from them.<sup>130</sup> What he sought was to *challenge the very principle of principles, and create doctrine against doctrines*. If Clausewitz had only wanted to refute Bülow at the same level of analysis that Bülow was himself writing, he would have kept only to this direct refutation, but instead, if we look to other sections of *On War*, the scepticism which Clausewitz makes use of is not merely a scepticism in specific facts and analysis, but scepticism as an entire method of analysis.

The reason why Clausewitz could eventually go beyond mere direct refutation and question positive doctrines on a methodological or higher level was in fact the underlying unity, which we set out to explore in this chapter, linking the metaphysics to the Enlightenment war theories. What was illogical in Bulow's attempts to turn a

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<sup>129</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Bk. IV, Ch 13, p. 246-247

<sup>130</sup> Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, p. 453

few examples of exocentric retreats into a ‘principle’ of retreats, was not the reasoning itself, providing examples from past battles and deducing causal relationships between actions and military success. The problem was rather the absolute certainty that was allocated to the deduction, followed by the inference based on this, of an absolute principle. One could argue a logical stance both for and against exocentric retreats, and by extension any single positive doctrine, because of war’s many forces and possibilities, reciprocal actions and contradictions. And so, while Clausewitz could provide proof showing the opposite of Bülow’s conclusion, he could not demonstrate, and indeed knew not to even attempt to demonstrate, that a counter-example, such as the battle of Brienne could provide an opposite doctrine. In different contexts, there can be distinct, logical deductions which are mutually exclusive and opposite one another, that are nonetheless *equally true*, which is to say that the study of war had the ability to generate antinomies of pure reason, or mutually exclusive *conditional* truths which fail to demonstrate themselves or their opposites as *unconditional* truths in the process of being compared or analyzed jointly. (We will be breaking down this complex Kantian argument in the upcoming chapter.)

The result of this ‘irreconcilable opposition between such a theory and practice’ was according to Clausewitz the necessary outcome of any ‘endeavour to establish maxims, rules, and even systems for the conduct of war,’ because it meant attempting to circumscribe or place into a system, something that had no definite limits.<sup>131</sup> This is the source of the contradictions which appear in history, and the antinomies that emerge as so many examples both prove and disprove every positive doctrine. By bringing forward the paradox itself, rather than tying himself down to mere agreeing

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<sup>131</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Bk. II, Ch 2, p. 74

with or disagreeing with Bülow's conclusions, Clausewitz cut the underlying basis of the argument, he was escaping the endless circle of agreeing or disagreeing with any single principle of war, and moving his analysis to a higher level which encapsulated the debate and would thereby supersede it.

## Conclusion

A parallel evolution occurred in war theory and metaphysics during the Enlightenment. In the former case, the seed took root in the works of Montecuccoli, where victory was isolated as the only objective in battle, and a simplified list was drafted regarding how one could generate victory as a result of actions. Following this method, which linked causes to effects, an early rationalist tradition in war theory began asking whether or not it was possible to generate absolute principles of war, and finding themselves uncertain, they sought instead a moderate coexistence between art and science in the study of war. Meanwhile, in the metaphysics, thanks to Descartes' methodology, which provided like Montecuccoli a sort of platform, the quest for proving God's existence would eventually branch out into the far more ambitious question of God's form and substance. After this process had been completed, and not before, a similar transition occurred in the science of war, where method was assumed to provide the basis upon which to unearth those principles that could deliver victory with predictability and certainty. The problem, however, was that this certainty in knowledge became detached from material proof, precisely because of the faith in the methods in both philosophy and war theory. Any deduction

and induction could be proclaimed binding and absolute, from the study of causes through isolation, as though each causal relationship possessed something divine to it.

If Clausewitz noticed within the many existing theories of war a common failure to actually attain the certainty they claimed, it was because he understood that refuting one doctrine or another was an insufficient process: the very antinomies that produced distinct and opposite principles were the basis of a higher, negating truth. Whereas the metaphysical debates were indemonstrable because they were immaterial, the ‘principles of war’ were indemonstrable because there was simply too much material contradictory evidence, too much confusion, too much chaos for the cosmos to ever emerge. However, for him to see this, the antimonies, the causal breakdowns, and the reciprocity of action that made war too dynamic to be intelligible in static constants, Clausewitz, had to have been well introduced and very conscious of Kant’s system, because it was Kant first, who interjected and responded to the problem of antinomies, causality and certainty in pure reason. It was Kant’s sceptical method that Clausewitz turned to in order to build his *once-and-for-all* refutation of positive doctrines.

## Chapter Two – Clausewitz’s Scepticism: The First Dialectical Moment

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Scholars have argued alternative views regarding the origins Clausewitz’s theory of war. Some focusing on his personal history and relations, others on his experiences in battle, and in some cases, we come across comparisons with 20<sup>th</sup> century thought that attempt to ground *On War* in a simpler and perhaps more easily manageable framework. While each different approach may have some merit, none can individually surpass the importance of understanding how Clausewitz organized his thinking within the framework of a Kantian sceptical method. To exclude this central feature of Clausewitz’s way of philosophizing on war severely muddles how we interpret his work, because it means taking the substance of the work out of its vessel.

A recent example, which illustrates the problem quite well, can be found in Antoine Bousquet’s *The Scientific Way of War*, in which the author avoids the philosophical origins of Clausewitz’s thought in order to make space for an argument on metaphors, which elevates the significance of thermodynamics in *On War*. Bousquet does so by citing Clausewitz’s occasional use of concepts such as ‘friction,’ ‘perfect explosion,’ and ‘discharges,’ and then by suggesting that they come together

as a foundational or ontological backdrop.<sup>132</sup> In order to push forward his metaphorical analysis, the author makes use of a clever division that allows him to agree with Gat's discussion of influences in Clausewitz, while side-stepping the question altogether:

While Azar Gat has made a persuasive case for the influence of romanticism and anti-rationalist impulses on the writings of Carl von Clausewitz, [...] it would be misleading to view Clausewitz himself as anti-science or anti-reason.<sup>133</sup>

Bousquet is right in placing Clausewitz on this side of the divide, but he is wrong in suggesting that such a divide exists in the first place. While *On War* provides a careful refutation to the scientific certainties and claims made by Enlightenment war theorists, the either/or presentation, which places German Idealism against or opposed to science is false. In the context of Kantian thought, science is in no way dismissed, but rather elevated by its distinction from the metaphysics. It was precisely because the philosophical debates that had proclaimed and disclaimed grand, absolute truths about abstract, intangible objects such as god and miracles that Clausewitz could, by an analogous process, reclaim the scope of what science could afford war theory, and what it could not. In his first note regarding the project to write *On War*, Clausewitz explained that he was frustrated by the 'unscientific spirit' of the existing theories in the military arts, suggesting that those who wrote them tried 'so hard to make their systems coherent and complete that they

<sup>132</sup> Bousquet. *The Scientific Way of War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) p.85-91

<sup>133</sup> Bousquet. *The Scientific Way of War*, 85.



[were] stuffed with commonplaces, truisms, and nonsense of every kind.’<sup>134</sup> Clausewitz was not ‘anti-science’ or ‘anti-reason’, nor is that what a philosophical reading would claim. Rather, Clausewitz was simply being *reasonable about science*, because he was integrating into his works Kant’s theory of human understanding, which was, in fact, nothing else than a *scientific inquiry into reason itself*.

The distinction is an important one. Enlightenment thinkers had confused reason and science to the point where their quest for science had become unreasonable. Modern dialectics came about as a remedy to this situation, by offering an alternative way to conceive human understanding, allowing certain limits and inherent contradictions to be exposed. The outcome of this would be that the science of knowledge became more interested in the question of its own scope than in the question of its depth. Specifically, in the case of metaphysics, which was at the centre of these inquiries, the question transitioned from how to prove the existence of God, to an exploration of the proof itself: whether there could be any certainty to this demonstration. In order to be ‘reasonable about science’, the first requirement was a healthy dose of scepticism with regard to the scope human understanding and the relationship between observation, deduction, and certainty.

The difference between how Clausewitz makes use of scientific analogy and how Enlightenment thinkers made use of it is therefore diametrically opposed. Whereas the latter did in fact make science an ontological feature of their work, the basis upon which they hoped to edify their systems, Clausewitz did no such thing. Clausewitz’s does use thermodynamics in a scattered and non-systematized way in *On War*, but it has a purely heuristic, not ontological, purpose. Clausewitz himself

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<sup>134</sup> Clausewitz. ‘Author’s preface to an unpublished manuscript on the theory of war written between 1816 and 1818’, *On War*, Ed. Howard/Paret (Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 61

makes that very clear. In his own words, he explains that the use of scientific analogies and metaphors are ‘nothing more than ornamental flourishes,’<sup>135</sup> which is to say that even when he used metaphors in his own discussion, he did not attribute any serious value to them: his use of thermodynamics was not actually *derived scientifically*, it was merely *borrowed* from science and attached as an ‘ornament,’ to help the reader understand as an image, that which has actually derived from a mix of philosophy, war history, and critical analysis.

To understand the centrality of philosophy in Clausewitz’s method requires a much deeper reading, which does not limit itself to extracting various snippets and proclaiming a whole. Indeed, as Fernandez-Vega notes, it cannot be boiled down to being anti-Enlightenment or not, since Clausewitz was writing at a time that was characterized by a combination of trends (Sturm und Drang, Kantianism, idealism, historicism, romanticism and nationalism).<sup>136</sup> Picking and choosing among influences in an either/or way is a completely self-defeating approach to understanding Clausewitz. We should be doing the very opposite, finding ways to analyze the various influences in ways that makes room for them to coexist intellectually and logically. Even if the overarching system was in fact Kantian, this did not exclude other sources, arguably it helped Clausewitz improve and enhance the proof of their conclusions in a more objective way.

The one concept that allows us to appreciate the complexity of Clausewitz’s frame of mind and the influences that shaped it is without a doubt also his most defining characteristic as a scholar: he was profoundly sceptical. It is plain to see. In fact, he was viscerally so, as is well illustrated in a letter written in 1827:

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<sup>135</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. II, Ch 5, p 117

<sup>136</sup> Fernandez-Vega, José, *Las guerras de la politica: Clausewitz de Maquiavelo a Peron*, p. 72

I hate the sort of technical language that leads us to believe we can reduce the individual case to a universal, to the inevitable. Strategists manipulate these terminologies as if they were algebraic formulae, whose accuracy has long been established, brief formulae that may be used as substitutes for the original reality. But these phrases do not even represent clear and definite principles. Rather they are nebulous, ambiguous expressions, whose true meaning remains open to question. This is no accident. Their vagueness is intended, because they did not derive from what is essential and could be presented as universal truth. Consequently the inventors of these terms found it natural to allow a certain latitude in their meaning.<sup>137</sup>

That being said, it is not enough to state that Clausewitz was a sceptic. The proper question thereafter should rather be: what kind of a sceptic was he? And to answer this one must be far more thorough. The specific kind of scepticism we find in Clausewitz first appeared in Hume, and it culminated in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

### The Kantian Link: Kiesewetter

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<sup>137</sup> Clausewitz, 'Letter to Roeder, December 22, 1827', *Two Letters on Strategy*, Ed. Peter Paret and Daniel Moran, (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College, 1984).

No interpreter of Clausewitz has weighed in against the role of Kant in the formation of Clausewitz's thought more aggressively, and with more authority, than Raymond Aron in *Penser la guerre*. It is worth noting a few of his concerns here, in order to keep them in mind, but ultimately I will return to his overall argument only in Part II, so that I may discuss his dual dismissal of both Hegel and Kant at once. With regard to Kant, specifically, Aron starts off by suggesting that Clausewitz never actually read Kant, but was merely introduced to his works indirectly. This argument, which is stated but not backed up in any serious way is thereafter followed by a blatantly weak ad hominem argument against the person who represents this indirect link, Prof. Kiesewetter. Aron writes that Kiesewetter was reputed as providing Kantian doctrines in 'homeopathic doses'.<sup>138</sup> Before even engaging with the question of a Kantian influence in Clausewitz, Aron has cast an unfounded doubt on the question.

It is worth taking a bit of time to dismiss this line of argument right away, so that we may quickly move into Aron's more serious points. Even though Aron may have considered Kiesewetter in such negative light, Kant himself did not share the impression, as he corresponded with Kiesewetter regularly and went so far as to ask his publisher in Berlin to hire Kiesewetter as the proof editor for the *Critique of practical reason*.<sup>139</sup> There is therefore no reason to give credence to Aron's attack on Kiesewetter in the first place. But even if it were true, why should we judge the quality of the teacher if the goal is to see whether or not Clausewitz understood Kant? Is it not impossible for the apprentice to outpace his master, anyway?

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<sup>138</sup> Aron. *Penser la Guerre, Tome I*, p. 362

<sup>139</sup> Hannah Arendt. *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 7

A way to determine this is to gauge whether or not when Clausewitz made references to Kant, he was paraphrasing the original or rather the textbooks and distillations written by Kiesewetter, which he would have had access to while studying under him. That being said, when we consider, as Aron does, that Kiesewetter was a ‘vulgarisateur’ (meaning someone who simplifies ideas in order to popularize them),<sup>140</sup> it is not a huge step to jump over Kiesewetter, especially if it simply means Clausewitz was paraphrasing a person who was paraphrasing Kant. The fact is that Clausewitz was applying Kant, and in all likelihood, and mostly, given the depth of his appreciation, it seems to be a near-certainty that Clausewitz would have read the originals, first because he was clearly interested in them, and secondly because as a student, then a professor and finally as the Commander of the War College, there is no doubt he had access to copies of the philosopher’s works if he wanted them, especially in a time when Kant was all the rage across Prussia, and had been published in Berlin.

That being said, there is an argument to be made which strongly suggests that Clausewitz had in fact read and understood Kant directly. Echevarria provides us with the right place where to find it, by having noticed that the paragraph below, written by Clausewitz, was very similar to one penned by Kiesewetter:

Every educated person knows that a formal truth is the condition sine qua non of all truth and that it can only exist in the correct form... [By formal truth] we mean the agreement of a concept with respect to the

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<sup>140</sup> Raymond Aron, *Sur Clausewitz* (Paris: Éditions Complexe, 1980), p. 44-45

laws of thought [logic]. These laws are the same for all humanity; consequently, logical truth must also be the same for all humanity.<sup>141</sup>

Echevarria rightly argues that the similarities Keisewetter's version of this are 'too obvious to ignore',<sup>142</sup> but if we step back and consider the original version of this idea, written by Kant in the *Logic*, there is no reason to believe that Clausewitz was paraphrasing Kiesewetter and not the original. In fact, the extra words in Clausewitz's version, which do not appear in the quote Echevarria uses from Kiesewetter's Outline of Logic,<sup>143</sup> renders additional elements, including the 'agreement of a concept' and the concept of 'universality' which is implied in Clausewitz's mention of 'all humanity.' These two extra points do appear in the passage from Kant to which both were referring.<sup>144</sup> It suggests, quite frankly, that Clausewitz understood the argument better, or at least summarized it better, than Kiesewetter had.

Aron does in fact acknowledge the fact that elements of Kant can be found in Clausewitz, but he minimizes them. Enumerating various examples, namely, reciprocity of action, synthetic/analytic knowledge, genius – all of which we shall discuss further below – he relegates these to something quite superficial, going so far as to say that Clausewitz, at best, could formulate phrases and expressions that *sounded Kantian*.<sup>145</sup> Though it is a good start to find areas in Clausewitz which have a

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<sup>141</sup> Antulio J. Echevarria. *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 22 (citing Clausewitz, 'Ueber den Zustand der Theorie', in *Schriften-Aufsätze-Studien-Briefe*, p. 28, 34)

<sup>142</sup> Echevarria. *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*, p. 22

<sup>143</sup> Echevarria. *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*, p. 22 (citing Kiesewetter, *Grundriss*, I, 110-11)

<sup>144</sup> Immanuel Kant. *Logic*, Tr. John Richardson (London: Simpkin & Marshal, 1819), p. 69

<sup>145</sup> Aron. *Penser la Guerre, Tome I*, p. 368

‘family resemblance’<sup>146</sup> to Kant, as Fernandez Vega does,<sup>147</sup> there is much work that remains to be done to go beyond these snippets, and analyzing how the whole of their use comes together into a far more systematized understanding and convergence with Kant’s philosophy. Sounding is one thing, but what Clausewitz was doing was quite another. Granted, he did not integrate the whole of Kant systematically into his work, but this does not imply the reverse, that Clausewitz was not systematically and wholly Kantian in his own work. Clausewitz made good and proper use of those elements of Kantian thought that he needed, where he needed them, and at times this shows up in a superficial way, but that should not be construed as meaning a minor influence, let alone a complete lack of it. As we shall see, Clausewitz was very precise in his use of Kant. When he did refer to Kantian phrases and expressions, he used them in ways that were accurate, as we saw above, but more importantly, very well chosen and relevant, as we shall see below. The examples of the Kantian influence here in chapter 2 and later in chapter 4 should be sufficient in themselves to cast some serious doubt on the thrust of Aron’s argument.

In exploring the Kantian elements in the works of Clausewitz, a frustrating element becomes increasingly apparent. On most occasions where Clausewitz borrows almost word for word from Kant, he does so in very limited and precise ways that apply to a specific item, and these examples can be easily identified because they are so clear and concise. However, as we shall explore later, in Chapter 4, the larger Kantian influence, the one that underpins the intellectual and philosophical context of *On War* cannot be found in one quote or another, it must be appreciated on the whole and this means in a somewhat abstracted way. It is impossible to merely distil this

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<sup>146</sup> José Fernandez Vega. ‘War as ‘Art’: Aesthetics and Politics in Clausewitz’s Social Thinking’ in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 129

<sup>147</sup>

overarching framework. Rather, it must be shown that *On War* converges methodologically and ontologically with the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The minor examples serve to remind us of the links, but the true influence is more significant, albeit less tangible. It would be a rather pointless endeavour to pick out Kantian influences for its own sake, were it not framed within this larger question, because it is this approach to human understanding itself, the scope of what can be known to the human mind, that allows Clausewitz to refute the Enlightenment's positive doctrines with a system of scepticism.

### The New Scepticism: From Hume to Kant

If Hume delivered a serious blow to the works of Descartes and Berkeley, this was not achieved by applying a whole new system of analysis so much as turning rationalism onto itself. He accepted the theory of ideas developed by Descartes, but 'followed it to its logical conclusions, or, that is, to the point that he denied genuine knowledge, basic realities (for example, causes, a substantial self), and real values.'<sup>148</sup> Hume undermined the conclusions of empiricism using its own argumentative techniques, salvaging the basis at the cost of the conclusions. He effectively brought the metaphysical debates of the past century, to a discomfoting standstill, where certain features of empirical reasoning such as the origin of ideas and the distinctions between factual and relational knowledge were elevated and improved, whereas claims to absolute knowledge of the divine, of miracles, and supernatural events were

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<sup>148</sup> Norton, David Fate. *David Hume : Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 4 (An elaboration on comments first written by Thomas Reid. Citation: *The Works of Thomas Reid*, ed. Hamilton, 2 vols, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, (Edinburgh: MacLachan and Stewart, 1872).



relegated to intellectual oblivion. However the complete effect was to instil in the empirical system a new form of scepticism that seemed impossible to remedy. The new scepticism found in Hume can be understood as having two widely accepted but divergent outcomes:

The first [is to see] Hume as having advanced a radical scepticism which devastated the very possibility of scientific knowledge. The other [is to regard] Hume as having introduced a healthy scepticism prompting philosophers and scientists to abandon rash claims of modern rationalists and to embrace humbly the fact that non-trivial knowledge is after all only probable.<sup>149</sup>

Either way, reason was forced to engage in a discussion about itself, its scope and depth, from which certainty in the world of ideas would never remerge entirely. This introspection would begin with a categorization of all knowledge as belonging to one of two forms. Customarily referred to as ‘Hume’s fork’, his breakdown of human understanding generates two distinct types of knowledge: ‘relations of ideas’ and ‘matters of fact.’ Here, he is proposing that one must separate human understanding into two mutually exclusive planes, and consider as inadmissible any form of knowledge that claims to exist outside of the two:

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<sup>149</sup> Robert E. Butts. ‘Hume’s Scepticism’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jun.-Sep., 1959), p. 413

All the objects of human reason or enquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, relations of ideas, and matters of fact. Of the first kind are the sciences of geometry, algebra, and arithmetic [...] Matters of fact, which are the second objects of human reason, are not ascertained in the same manner; nor is our evidence of their truth, however great, of a like nature with the foregoing. The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible, because it can never imply a contradiction, and is conceived by the mind with the same facility and distinctness, as if ever so conformable to reality.<sup>150</sup>

The significance of these two paragraphs is difficult to ascertain at first, but it marks a pivotal moment in philosophy, the beginning of modern dialectical reasoning, where an inherent contradiction serves as the basis upon which to explore the scope of human understanding. It is in direct opposition to the Cartesian tradition, where knowledge was understood as ‘global and unitary’ in that ‘all cognizable objects are knowable in the same way and follow an order similar to that of the terms in a mathematical demonstration, the whole body of human knowledge is necessarily one.’<sup>151</sup> Hume understood knowledge as having two separate and mutually exclusive realms, an approach which would find its finality in the works of Kant, where this seed is cultivated to its ultimate purpose, with the introduction of the synthetic/analytic division of knowledge, which was a derivative of this initial

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<sup>150</sup> David Hume. *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), p. 25

<sup>151</sup> Etienne Gilson and Thomas Langan, *A History of Philosophy, Modern Philosophy From Descartes to Kant*, (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 58

argument.<sup>152</sup> This, however, is a discussion to be had later when the text transitions to a discussion of Kant's philosophy.

More interesting for us now is how Hume cast doubt on the certitude of causality. Was Hume interested in the question, because he recognized that causality was at the central weakness of metaphysical exploration? Or did he stumble upon it in an attempt to save empiricism from itself? Either way, saving the empiricist doctrine regarding the origin of ideas had the unfortunate cost of the discrediting of our ordinary idea of causation.<sup>153</sup> The two were inherent to one another. In his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume was not seeking to challenge certainty outright, but rather to characterize certainty in knowledge, which required that he study the problems of evidence and justification.<sup>154</sup> Ultimately, this process uncovered that even the one thing which science took most for granted, and which was at the centre not only of its origin, but also each subsequent discovery, remained a limited concept, subject to scepticism. Causal effects could no longer be construed as the the absolute manifestation of truth, and consequently could not serve as the methodological template upon which to edify the types of inferences which Berkeley and Descartes had made. Hume wrote,

When we look about us towards external objects, and consider the operation of causes, we are never able, in a single instance, to discover any power or necessary connection; any quality, which binds the effect to

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<sup>152</sup> George Rey. *The Analytic/Synthetic Distinction*, First published Thu Aug 14, 2003; substantive revision Fri Aug 15, 2008. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/analytic-synthetic>

<sup>153</sup> Harold Langsam. 'Kant, Hume, and Our Ordinary Concept of Causation', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Sep. 1994), p. 629

<sup>154</sup> Robert E. Butts. 'Hume's Scepticism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jun.-Sep. 1959), p. 414

the cause, and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other. We only find, that the one does actually, in fact, follow the other. The impulse of one billiard-ball is attended with motion in the second. This is the whole that appears to the outward senses. The mind feels no sentiment or inward impression from this succession of objects: consequently, there is not, in any single, particular instance of cause and effect, any thing which can suggest the idea of power or necessary connection.<sup>155</sup>

‘The thrust of Hume’s analysis [was] directed toward showing that our causal inferences are neither intuitive, nor demonstrable, nor based on perceptions of causal connections or rational inference from past experience.’<sup>156</sup> In the end, he brought to light a firm doubt on necessary connections and therefore causality itself. His conclusions were extremely damaging not only to the Cogito itself, which posits a causal inference regarding thought and being, but also in the entire method which used it as a starting point for further inferences. Indeed, if we return to the paragraphs taken from Descartes and Berkeley above, we find further demonstrations which entirely depend on causality being free from any scepticism: God’s existence is made ‘evident’ as nothing more than a circular thought process based upon a set of inverse causal relations, where I think ergo I am, and since being and sentience are combined as causal, it becomes logical to induce the God’ existence as merely I am ergo God thinks. Therefore, to doubt the experience of causality, is no small matter, but forces

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<sup>155</sup> David Hume. *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), p. 63

<sup>156</sup> Norton, David Fate. *David Hume : Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 228

scepticism upon the entire metaphysical project, not merely in its conclusions, but more importantly, at every point in the method, from the inference of God as the *Causa Prima* of the universe at one end to the Cogito at the opposite end. Only one causal inference remains certain: if causality is no longer anointed with an immortal or supernatural certainty, then it appeared that certainty itself had died.

Clausewitz's scepticism, though it does not show itself to be in any particular way to be informed directly by Hume, nonetheless fits into the tradition of thought bequeathed by Hume. This can be explained by the fact that Clausewitz's knowledge of Kant would have introduced him to the central argument of the Critique of Pure Reason, which is in fact to build upon, while also refuting Hume by using critical reasoning to bypass or rather go beyond this initial state of scepticism in causality. Kant work was a transition from pure scepticism to sceptical method, but nonetheless to engage directly with the problem of certainty and causality. In *On War*, Clausewitz positions himself clearly in this tradition of questioning causality, and eventually transitioning from pure scepticism to sceptical method as well. In this passage from Clausewitz's *Kritik*, in Book II, he expresses scepticism with regard to causality in a way that places him squarely in the intellectual context of Hume and Kant:

From the simple narration of an historical occurrence which places events in chronological order, or at most only touches on their more immediate causes [...] As respects the tracing of effect to cause, that is often attended with the insuperable difficulty that the real causes are not known. In none of the relations of life does this so frequently happen as in War, where events are seldom fully known, and still less

motives, as the latter have been, perhaps purposely, concealed by the chief actor, or have been of such a transient and accidental character that they have been lost for history. For this reason critical narration must generally proceed hand in hand with historical investigation, and still such a want of connection between cause and effect will often present itself, that it does not seem justifiable to consider effects as the necessary results of known causes.<sup>157</sup>

Even though he proposes that one can and should study causality and war, or at least attempt to do so through the many interfering layers of possible causes and effects, Clausewitz nonetheless ends the paragraph with a caveat: even if you have done this perfectly well, there should remain some doubt. The investigation does not lead to *necessity*, which means that on the subject of causality, its study, and its implications, Clausewitz clearly stands with Hume and Kant, as opposed to their predecessors.

This scepticism regarding causes and effects leads Clausewitz to systematize his study in the form of a ‘Kritik’, found in Book II. It is worth briefly mentioning here that title of this section can be understood as an allusion to Kant, whose three major works were also titled the ‘Critiques’. This method was essentially Kant’s remedy to the problem of uncertainty. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant explains this succinctly: ‘The dogmatical use of reason without criticism leads to groundless assertions, against which others equally specious can always be set, thus ending

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<sup>157</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. II, Ch 5, pp. 100-101

unavoidably in scepticism.’<sup>158</sup> This sentence sums up exactly what Clausewitz tried to resolve in his own chapter entitled ‘Kritik’.

In response to the uncertainty he found in studying causality in war, Clausewitz’s solution was to make no claim to provide the soldier with absolute truths regarding what can be done in battle to guarantee victory. Instead, he offered a ‘limited theory’ of war, one which replaced such laws, rules and principles, for adaptable concepts, designed to meet ‘the most probable cases’<sup>159</sup> instead of all cases, for all time and with absolute certainty. This limited approach would nonetheless allow him to generate a practical guidebook for the soldier, but without falling again into the antinomies of reason which were the product of positive doctrines.

### Preliminary Features of the Kantian Methodology in Clausewitz

The more we attempt to unearth the Kantian element in Clausewitz’s works, the less we can draw simply on quotes and details that link the two. Instead we must consider the larger picture regarding how one resolves problems of reason, and while in many cases the two overlap, which facilitates the exploration, there are some areas where the links are intellectual and not necessarily linguistic. This makes it slightly more difficult to demonstrate, but should not stop us in our tracks. For example, with regard to antinomies of reason, Clausewitz never in fact used the term ‘antinomy’ in his writings at all, but he nonetheless exposed and analyzed the problem of antinomies

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<sup>158</sup> Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, Tr. J.M.D Meiklejohn (London: George Bell & Sons, 1893) p. 14

<sup>159</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. III, Ch 5, p. 143

in a Kantian way. Arguably, he probably chose to keep his language simple, because unlike Kant, his readers would not be philosophers, but practitioners.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant uses the antimonies of pure reason to show that there are problems of reason that cannot be resolved without paradoxical conclusions. Using four distinct examples, he shows the reader that certain mutually exclusive and opposite ideas are nonetheless equally demonstrable and valid in pure reason. In one of these, he makes the parallel argument that, a) the universe is finite in time and space, and b) the universe is infinite in time and space, and then proceeds to argue that both are perfectly tenable and logical.<sup>160</sup> The relationship between the two ideas is that the validation of either one necessarily invalidates the other; it is impossible to prove both at once. Also, the invalidation of one does not necessarily validate the other, since the possibility that both are false remains. If it were demonstrated that the universe is not determinable, it is not a thing in itself but is conditional and incomplete, then it could very well be neither finite nor infinite.<sup>161</sup> The effect of this sceptical form of thinking is that unlike Hume, who fell into blanket scepticism, here Kant explains, that it leads rather to a useful sceptical method. Instead of being bogged down by scepticism regarding each proposition, we achieve a level of thinking about both propositions at once that offer us better intellectual guidance on the subject.

The transcendental dialectic, therefore, does not favour scepticism, but the sceptical method, which can point to the transcendental dialectic as an example of its great utility. For when we allow the arguments of

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<sup>160</sup> Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 263-289

<sup>161</sup> Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 310-316



reason to oppose one another with perfect freedom, something useful and serviceable for the correction of our judgement will always result, though it may not always be what we were looking for.<sup>162</sup>

Clausewitz mimics the argument, when, having discussed what appears to be a series of contradictions and antinomies in the science of war, he asks whether when faced with the ‘uncertainty of all knowledge and all of science’ it should not make ‘him doubt himself and others’, but he eventually concludes like Kant that scepticism can be made *serviceable*:

When the discernment is clear and deep, none but general principles [Grundsätze] and views of action from a high standpoint can be the result; and on these principles [Grundsätze] the opinion in each particular case immediately under consideration lies, as it were, at anchor. But to keep to these results of bygone reflection in opposition to the stream of opinions and phenomena which the present brings with it is just the difficulty. Between the particular case and the principle [Grundsatz] there is often a wide space which cannot always be traversed on a visible chain of conclusions, and where a certain

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<sup>162</sup> Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Weigelt (New York: Penguin, 2007), p. 447 [I’ve used this translation because the word choice brings out a similar idea. To be clear though, the two authors are not using the same term, but are making a similar argument with synonyms that mean ‘beneficial’ or ‘serviceable’ Clausewitz uses ‘wohlthätig’ whereas Kant is using ‘grossen Nutzens’.]

faith in self is necessary, and a certain amount of scepticism is  
*serviceable [my emphasis]*.<sup>163</sup>

If Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* sought to salvage aspects of the empirical method at the expense of certainty we could say that Kant, in trying to repair the damages of Hume's scepticism, and to salvage at least our empirical knowledge of the natural sciences, was willing to expend elements of the empirical method towards that end, exchanging its linear and straight path to unmanageable certainty and scepticism, for a dialectical path that leads to manageable paradoxes. Thus, Kant wrote *Critique of Pure Reason* with two objectives in mind: first, positively, to defend the possibility of scientific and everyday knowledge (common sense); and second, negatively, to show that traditional metaphysics are impossible.<sup>164</sup> To this end, Kant started the *Critique of Pure Reason* by developing a set of categories of knowledge based on two dichotomous pairs: the synthetic/analytic and the a-priori/a-posteriori, meant to include all possible forms of knowledge. With regard to the first of the two dichotomies, he explained:

Either the predicate B belongs to the subject A, as somewhat which is contained (though covertly) in the conception of A; or the predicate B lies completely out of the conception A, although it stands in

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<sup>163</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. I, Ch.3, p. 45

<sup>164</sup> Georges Dicker. *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 6

connection with it. In the first instance, I term the judgement analytical, in the second, synthetical.<sup>165</sup>

As examples of this, Kant offers the judgement that ‘all bodies are extended’ for the former, because extension is a feature inherent to the definition of a ‘body’. A synthetic judgement, on the other hand would be ‘this body is heavy’, which cannot be inherently known, but which must connect the notion of body to that of gravity.

With regard to the a-priori/a-posteriori the former represents a knowledge which emerges as self-evident for having been thought, whereas in latter depends on a process such as experimenting.<sup>166</sup> When superimposed, these two dichotomies generate four quadrants. The analytic/a-priori and the synthetic/a-posteriori pose no problem, because we can easily conceive them. The analytic/a-posteriori is nonsensical. This leaves the synthetic/a-priori as the central problem of the inquiry. Kant formulates his thesis question for the Critique of Pure Reason in the fewest terms: ‘How are a-priori synthetic judgements possible?’<sup>167</sup>

Kant explains the nature of synthetical judgements a-priori by referring to mathematical principles: while an equation does not require experimentation to prove, solving it is nonetheless a synthetic process because it requires intuition and the outcome is not self-evident, but is the coming together of two or more other concepts. Using the example  $7+5=12$ , Kant explains that one cannot by analysis deduce that the number twelve is inherently the sum of 7 and 5. The same is true of various geometrical and physical principles. Whenever tested, these intuitive ideas become

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<sup>165</sup> Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 7

<sup>166</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 7-8

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. p. 12

materially evident. And Kant adds that metaphysics are in the same category, because they are synthetic propositions (i.e. God is not inherent to the definition of the universe), but ones that cannot be tested because they 'leave far behind us the limits of experience.'<sup>168</sup>

Kant was unsatisfied with Hume's conclusion, arguing that Hume 'stopped short at the synthetical proposition of the connection of an effect with its cause, insisting that such propositions a-priori were impossible. According to his conclusion, then, all that we term metaphysical science is a mere delusion [if that were the case] there likewise could not be any pure mathematical science.'<sup>169</sup> Kant's answer to Hume on this question is found most unambiguously in his Second Analogy,<sup>170</sup> in which he stood in 'complete agreement with Hume that our knowledge of causal connections between specific events is a posteriori not a priori, synthetic, not analytic, inductive not logical, probable not certain. [...] [He agreed with Hume in disagreeing] with the rationalists who thought that logical insight into causal connections was possible.'<sup>171</sup> However, even though they agreed on this premise, Kant's conclusions were quite different.

Using his own terminology, Kant described the problem of causality as a 'synthetic proposition', which must be dealt with using a transcendental argument or one where the truth of the principle is a necessary condition of experience.<sup>172</sup> In answer to Hume's scepticism towards causality, Kant explained that the problem of cause and effect, its subjective validity as a universal idea, can be overcome with the objective validity it takes on when limited to the scope of what is observable. He

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid. pp. 9-12

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. p. 12

<sup>170</sup> Dicker. *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 163

<sup>171</sup> Lewis Beck. *Essays on Kant and Hume*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 134

<sup>172</sup> Dicker. *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 163

states, 'causality in the succession of phenomena is therefore valid for all objects of experience, because it is itself the ground of the possibility of experience.'<sup>173</sup> The universal validity of causality in the material world or for experimentation comes from our ability to perceive alterations of the state of substance over time, and our ability to synthesize this, using our imagination, into a coherent 'continuous determination of the position in time of all phenomena.'<sup>174</sup>

What did this mean? Kant had set causality free from Hume's grips, insofar as it applied to certain areas of knowledge for which we could be satisfied with it as a process of imagination. But that also meant that for other areas, we could not be satisfied, and that even when we were satisfied with it, this was not some 'holy' certainty, but a mere human acceptance of it. Causality had lost not only its divinity, but also its universality: it had been forced into a compartment of human knowledge, thus creating a chasm between that area of knowledge where causality is admissible as a result being experienced therefore allowing it to be intuitively demonstrable in the mind of man, as opposed to the plane of analysis where this human intuition is excluded. Kant had effectively broken apart man's knowledge of the world from the world itself, the distinction between phenomena or how things appear to the human mind, and noumena, the things in themselves.<sup>175</sup> Within the a-posteriori / synthetic category, Kant had spliced the observational sciences from the lot, allowing a general acceptance of causality whereby he rehabilitated natural sciences and mathematics from the grips of Hume's complete scepticism, but in doing so also cut metaphysics' last standing leg. Now, the material world would become infused with a type of certainty, but its own self-contained certainty limiting causality to the scope of that

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<sup>173</sup> Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 150

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, p. 141-155

<sup>175</sup> Michael Rohlf. 'Immanuel Kant' *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/kant>

which is measurable and tangible the world of objects. The world of ideas could be isolated from this, thereby clarifying reason itself. In the end, both ‘reason’ and ‘science’ remerged from the Kantian process, but in the context of the two spheres: the ideal and the material, floating in a paradoxical stasis. This is the very same conceptual splice upon which Clausewitz would eventually build up his analysis of the ideal and real forms of war in his absolute war / real war dichotomy, which is the subject of the upcoming Chapter 4.

### Positive Doctrines in War Theory as Synthetical Judgements A-Priori

Given that Clausewitz’s objective was to invalidate strict formulas, models, and schematics, in order for the military professional to come face to face with the true difficulties of winning, rather than to depend on false certitudes, which would blind his judgment,<sup>176</sup> it was necessary for him to go beyond his intuition that positive doctrines of Enlightenment military theory were flawed, he needed to uncover the false logic that generated them, coupled with an explanation for why indemonstrable principles could find such uptake in the world, and give impressions of truth and certainty. Luckily for him, Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason had set the groundwork for this task.

If Clausewitz never actually wrote, word for word, that *positive doctrines are synthetical judgements a-priori*, he nonetheless constructed his arguments in ways that made this point for him. In fact, he went further than this. He took for granted that

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<sup>176</sup> Col. Eugène Carrias, *La pensée militaire allemande*, (Paris : Presses universitaires de France, 1948), p. 201

positive doctrines were equivalent concepts to metaphysical propositions, and his refutations did not innovate upon or improve Kant's system, but simply made use of it in direct refutation, as though the two forms of reasoning were not merely analogous, they were in fact congruous to one another, identical in form and logic. This form of analysis appears throughout *On War*, but it is systematized in the Book II, Chapter 5, entitled the Critique, which is fitting, since the very term 'critique' in the Kantian tradition is a method by which to stop conditioned, empirical reason from constituting in and of itself the basis for universal principles.<sup>177</sup>

A preliminary way to gauge this is to look at how either synthetical judgements a-priori or positive doctrines are expressed in form and language. The only way to represent them as simple and fundamental truths is that they be compressed or contained in a way that conveys their universality in the simplest form (i.e.  $7 + 5 = 12$ ). Kant had in fact concluded that:

In all theoretical sciences of reason, synthetical judgements a-priori are contained as principles.'<sup>178</sup> [In allen theoretischen Wissenschaften der Vernunft sind synthetische Urteile a priori als Prinzipien enthalten]<sup>179</sup>

Interestingly, Clausewitz makes the exact same observation with regard to positive doctrines:

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<sup>177</sup> Jean-Marie Vaysse. *Le vocabulaire de Kant*, (Paris : Ellipses, 2010), p. 87 (note: the author here is referring more specifically to principles as they apply to 'will')

<sup>178</sup> Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 9

<sup>179</sup> Note that this passage was added to the second edition (1787), but was not included in the first (1781).

Principles, rules, prescriptions, and methods [Grundsätze, Regeln, Vorschriften und Methoden] are conceptions indispensable to a theory of the conduct of war in so far as the theory leads to positive doctrines, because in doctrines the truth can only crystallise itself in such forms.<sup>180</sup>

Beyond exposing the common form which they take, Clausewitz also intellectualized the problem of positive doctrines using the Kantian separation of categories in human understanding, as he attempted to clarify where and how exactly the inconsistency emerges in their claims, relative to the question scope of human understanding. Having already described them with blunt criticism as ‘useless’, a ‘whirl of opinions, which neither revolved on any central pivot nor according to any appreciable laws, could not but be distasteful to people’s minds’, and finally as simply unable to ‘gain ascendancy in the real world,’<sup>181</sup> Clausewitz, goes on to demonstrate his objection to these in a more objective way:

All these attempts at theory are only to be considered in their analytical part as progress in the province of truth, but in their synthetical part, in their precepts and rules, they are quite unserviceable.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. II, Ch. 4, p. 95

<sup>181</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. II, Ch. 2, p. 73-75

<sup>182</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. II, Ch. 2, p. 75



Clausewitz borrows not only the synthetic/analytic divide from Kant's method, but he goes on to substantiate it by making a very clever merger between the arguments which Kant makes regarding what exactly makes knowledge 'synthetical' in the first place. As we saw above, while analytical knowledge is inherent to the object itself, synthetic knowledge is a product of experience or observation of relations between objects. Kant argues in the Three Analogies of Experience that there are some preconditions that exist in how we understand relations that allows us to achieve synthetic knowledge as a process. A process necessarily implies time, and so Kant presents to his reader three possible notions of time: permanence, sequence and simultaneity, in which our concept of experiment and thus synthetic knowledge is different. In the first, he argues that to perceive a change, it must be perceived in relation to something that is permanent. So, if I can tell the difference between when my bicycle is dirty and when it is clean, it is also because I can recognize that both the dirty and the clean object before my eyes is the same, and that it is in fact still my bicycle, as oppose to different one. The second Analogy, as we saw above, deals with Hume's problem of establishing causation in the context of sequential events, and how through imagination be satisfied with the validity offered by objects of experience. Finally, the Third Analogy considers the objects that co-exist in time. Kant argues that for two objects to be perceived simultaneously by a single observer, they must be in relation of complete reciprocal action [Wechselwirkung] to each other.<sup>183</sup> This, for example, gives perceptual logic to the theory of gravity, as one observes how the sun and the planets interact in their orbits. Together, all three analogies complete the cognitive premises upon which we then edify our synthetical

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<sup>183</sup> Kant. Critique of Pure Reason, p. 156

knowledge of the world, upon which we are sufficiently satisfied with the credibility of our observations as to build knowledge upwards and beyond mere analysis.<sup>184</sup>

Right after Clausewitz writes the above passage in which he claims that the positive doctrines are analytic, not synthetic, he goes on to explain in three reasons why that is the case, and unsurprisingly, these three reasons proceed in perfect order: the first with regard to substance and change over time, the second with regard to causality, the third, reciprocal action. What is very original, however, is that he uses this intellectual background as the base, but he applies it very concretely to the question of war. First, he writes that while Enlightenment theorists sought determinate quantities, they failed to see that *everything* in war is variable. Secondly, they forgot to consider the *actions and effects* of moral and intellectual factors in war. And finally, in the third, Clausewitz adds, ‘they only pay regard to activity on one side, whilst war is a constant state of reciprocal action [Wechselwirkung], the effects of which are mutual.’<sup>185</sup> While these three different bases upon which synthetical knowledge is constructed are completely distinct and separate, because they exist on three different concepts of time, Clausewitz aptly makes the case that all three issues are relevant to our understanding of warfare and in every single one, the positive doctrines fail to show themselves as admissible as a synthetical knowledge. The passage is not a long one, nor does it show a very dense or thorough read of the three Analogies, but it nonetheless fulfills its task, which again shows Clausewitz being pragmatic: he is interested in framing war in a Kantian structure, but he will not go so far as to swamp his reader with the full explication. Is this because Clausewitz himself had a limited understanding of Kant, or was it instead that he knew that those he identified as his target readers, military professionals might be lost if he did not keep

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid. pp.132-136

<sup>185</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. II, Ch. 2, 75-76

it simple? Either way, he has taken his argument to its fullest effect, because having shown that positive doctrines do not achieve a synthetic outcome in any of the three possible forms that synthesis can take, he has cut the entire basis of their claim to being synthetic.

The positive doctrines are necessarily stuck in the analytical level, because they fail to elevate themselves above at least one of the premises, substance, causality, and reciprocal action, in which they could ground themselves as synthetic. And as of the moment that they try nonetheless to present themselves as synthetic even though they are not, they are doomed to produce contradictions, tensions and paradoxes. Clausewitz embraced this problem with principles of war and in fact would go so far as demonstrate this paradoxical tension by bringing out similar examples in his own works. As W.B. Gallie explains:

Clausewitz discusses a number of ‘principles of war’, but it is notable that he nowhere tries to deduce these principles from any single source or to establish relations of logical priority and subsequence between them. Moreover, in this connection he displays a curious and at first sight irritating habit. He will lay down some principle which immediately commends itself to common sense, that of constancy in one’s objective, or of the concentration or economy or security in the use of forces, for example; but he thereupon proceeds to show how

some other principle of war commonly interferes with it, to modify or even cancel its authority in certain situations.<sup>186</sup>

Clausewitz generally avoids using the word ‘principle’ altogether, though it regularly appears from cover to cover in the translations. In the above case, for example, Gallie uses the word ‘principle’ because he is citing the Howard/Paret translation as his primary source,<sup>187</sup> in which the word ‘principle’ is used in ways that are inconsistent.<sup>188</sup> The problem is that Clausewitz uses two distinct German words, ‘Prinzip’ and ‘Grundsatz’, which can be translated to ‘principle’ but have distinct connotations which Clausewitz recognizes in his usage of them, but which the translators have missed. As we saw in the opening section of part I, the etymological difference is quite important. While ‘Grundsatz’ is derived from earthly roots, meaning that something is firmly ‘grounded’, ‘Prinzip’ is the true German translation for the word ‘principle’, derived from the concepts of primacy and power. The latter of the two has an absolute and abstract connotation, whereas the former is relative and tangible. Clausewitz uses the word ‘Prinzip’ very scarcely. It comes up for example, when he argues that war is not imbued with a ‘principle of moderation’,<sup>189</sup> or else, when he speaks of the ‘principle of polarity’ which exists either between the victor and the defeated, or the different and opposite objectives in battle.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of War and Peace* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 44

<sup>187</sup> Gallie, *Philosophers of War and Peace*, Notes, p. 145

<sup>188</sup> Jan W. Honig has also shown other items on which the H/P translation is inconsistent in its use of terms, noting for example, in the case of ‘Politik’, that it was translated in to ‘politics’, ‘policy’, ‘statesmen’, ‘statecraft’ and ‘political conditions’, and that the adjective ‘politische’ is translated into a noun the five time it appears in conjunction with the words ‘Akt’, ‘Handlungen’, ‘Instrument’, and ‘Werkzeug’. See: Jan Willem Honig, ‘Clausewitz’s On War: Problems of Text and Translation’ in *Clausewitz and the Twenty-First Century*, Ed. Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 70.

<sup>189</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. II, Ch. 2, p. 76

<sup>190</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. I, Ch. 1, p. 2

An example of where the translation problem becomes flagrant is the title of Clausewitz's second most widely read book, 'The Principles of War',<sup>191</sup> which is a rendition of a textbook he had written while serving as the tutor of the Crown Prince. The original title in German is *Die Wichtigsten Grundsätze des Kriegführens*. The title literally means 'main grounding' and would be more properly be translated as 'The Fundamentals of War', because foundations are ground up, whereas principles are top down. The problem also appears in the Howard/Paret translation of *On War*, where they make absolutely no distinction between 'Grundsatz' and 'Prinzip'. A good example of this can be observed by comparing the Graham and Howard/Paret translation in Book IV, Chapter 13, where 'Prinzip' occurs once and 'Grundsatz' occurs five times. The Howard/Paret translations uses the word 'principle' for each 'Grundsatz', and simply omits the word 'Prinzip' altogether from the sentence in which it is written. Meanwhile, perhaps even more confusingly, Graham generally translates Grundsatz to 'maxim', which is a far more accurate word choice, but it is not always consistent. He does so for four of the five occurrences in chapter 13 and also uses the word 'principle' appropriately in the case of 'Prinzip.' However, he then goes on to use the word 'principle' for one of the 'Grundsatz' occurrences, which completely muddles the lot. In reality, Clausewitz saw an important difference between the two terms and he never used them interchangeably: 'Grundzatz' is what a soldier may use to frame his decisions on the battlefield; 'Prinzip' is for the higher conceptual sphere. The former has many examples, the latter is rarely used, and neither implies certainty in the link between the conceptual and the practical.

To return to Gallie's point, these oppositions and contradictions between 'Grundsatz' are the very center of Clausewitz's contention with regard to positive

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<sup>191</sup> Clausewitz. *Principles of War* (New York: Dover Publishing, 2003)

doctrines. In the same way that Kant used a discussion of the antinomies of reason to outline the structure of human understanding, so too did Clausewitz need to build up antinomies regarding the inherent contradiction regarding any single *Grundsatz*, in order to make evident the problems of reason one finds in positive doctrines. By doing what Gallie describes as an ‘irritating habit’, Clausewitz was in fact building a *serviceable* system of scepticism as opposed to falling simply into the sterility of pure scepticism. This is the role of dialectical reasoning, through which one does not get bogged down by contradictions, but elevates understanding from a false sense of absolute certainty to a set of true paradoxes. In the positive doctrines, this takes on the forms of a limited theory of war, which lowers its pretensions and tries to cover most of the cases, most of the time, as opposed to all cases always.

Clausewitz’s conclusion on positive doctrines was categorical: what leads a generally good maxim in the field to become a false principle when elevated to that level is the intellectual ‘emptiness’ that separates the two, the very process of attempting to transition from the *analytical* to the *synthetical*. His best demonstration of this can be found in his discussion of ‘key points’, which among Enlightenment theorists were thought to convey absolute advantages, so much so that they were in fact referred to as ‘decisive points’. While Clausewitz recognized that high terrain can be tactically beneficial, he refused to assume that high terrain is necessarily beneficial, and that even when it happens to be beneficial, it should not be taken to mean that this factor will be *decisive*:

Thus the highest point on a road over a mountain is always considered to possess a decisive importance, and it does in fact in the majority of

cases, but by no means in all. Such points are very often described in the despatches of generals by the name of key-points; but certainly again in a somewhat different and generally in a more restricted sense. This idea has been the starting point of a false theory (of which, perhaps, Lloyd may be regarded as the founder); and on this account, elevated points from which several roads descend into the adjacent country, came to be regarded as the keypoints of the country—as points which command the country.<sup>192</sup>

Earlier in *On War*, in the concluding remarks to Book V, Clausewitz had already made the argument regarding the absolute strategic value of terrain, in which he brings forward an important discussion of the ‘emptiness’ or ‘hollowness’ of their meaning, which again, as we shall soon observe, resonates ideas which Kant described. Clausewitz wrote:

But nevertheless the expressions ‘commanding ground,’ ‘sheltering position,’ ‘key of the country,’ in so far as they are founded on the nature of heights and descents, are hollow shells without any sound kernel. These imposing elements of theory have been chiefly resorted to in order to give a flavour to the seeming commonplace of military combinations; they have become the darling themes of learned soldiers, the magical wands of adepts in strategy, and neither the emptiness of these fanciful conceits [...] they are drawing water in the leaky vessel

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<sup>192</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VI, Ch. 23, pp. 490-491

of the Danaides. The conditions have been mistaken for the thing itself, the instrument for the hand. The occupation of such and such a position or space of ground, has been looked upon as an exercise of power like a thrust or a cut [...] is nothing but the lifeless instrument, a mere property which can only realise itself upon an object, a mere sign of plus or minus which wants the figures or quantities.<sup>193</sup>

In this paragraph, he shows once and for all just how well versed he is in fact in the works of Kant. The argument is taken from a short, lesser known text, which Kant wrote in the final years of life,<sup>194</sup> specifically, chapter 3 and the appendix of the essay *What Real Progress Has Been Made by Metaphysics in Germany Since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?*, which was a clarification on the subject of noumena (thing in itself) and phenomena (thing as it appears) in his earlier and far more widely read *Critique of Pure Reason*. Clausewitz not only drew from the *Wolff* text's main argument, he candidly borrowed the exact same analogy which Kant used, with regard to the Danaïdes from Greek mythology. Kant explains that metaphysics are stuck in being either theoretically or practically dogmatic, but nonetheless, they give the illusion of being demonstrable thanks to the antinomies of pure reason which they create. Antinomian arguments build the impression of truth not by demonstration of truth, but on the logic of negating their opposite; they attempt to generate

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<sup>193</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. V, Ch. 18, pp. 353-354

<sup>194</sup> This discovery adds to José Fernandez Vega's observation that Clausewitz made much use of Kant's 'later philosophy', including elements from the *Critique of Judgement*. See: 'War as 'Art': Aesthetics and Politics in Clausewitz's Social Thinking' in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 122 It is worth noting that in this text, I do not spend much time referring to the *Critique of Judgement*, because I consider that much of the work has already been done by others including Fernandez. Also, to understand the methodological rather than the substantive similarities, I perceive the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a better tool for this specific task.



*unconditional* knowledge, when in fact they are merely the sum of all coordinated conditions, where the antinomy of pure reason results in the confusion between the apparent and the thing itself. And it is this very dialectic that shapes the invitation to pass from reasoning regarding the sensible (material things) to the super-sensible (immaterial things).<sup>195</sup> Having written, slightly above that ‘materialism can never be employed as a principle for explaining the nature of our soul,’<sup>196</sup> Kant can therefore maintain, that ‘It was a vain labor that it traditionally gave itself, to reach the super-sensible by way of speculation and theoretical knowledge, and thus that science became the leaking sieve of the Danaïdes.’<sup>197</sup> There is an illusion of progress, of arriving at the goal, but it only achieved through trickery of the mind, where abstract conceptualizing cannot be rendered intuitive, because it is not positively demonstrable, but only to be deduced by the deceptions of contradiction and double negatives.

The ‘emptiness’ of these formulas, which Clausewitz is referring to, is best described in the sections of the Critique of Pure Reason which deal with the same problem, in which Kant explains that, ‘The effort to acquire metaphysical knowledge through concepts alone, however, is doomed to fail, according to Kant, because (in its simplest formulation) “concepts without intuitions are empty” (A52/B76)’<sup>198</sup> Kant is not only interested in showing that the metaphysical arguments are fallacious, he is also trying to unearth where their illusion of validity comes from. And this comes down to a concept which Clausewitz is referring to in the paragraph above, the distinction between what is conditioned and unconditioned, or the conflation between

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<sup>195</sup> Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy After 1781* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 397

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. p. 395

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. p. 396

<sup>198</sup> Grier, Michelle, ‘Kant's Critique of Metaphysics’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/kant-metaphysics>

noumena (the unconditioned thing itself) and phenomena (the conditioned thing, as it appears). The ‘supreme principle of pure reason’ that provides the background assumption under which the metaphysician proceeds, is that ‘*If the conditioned is given, the absolutely unconditioned [...] is also given (A308/B366)*’. That is to say that, the decision or justification for *seeking* the unconditioned offers a metaphysical principle that tells us that the unconditioned is *already given* [...] it is ‘there’ to be found.<sup>199</sup>

This is the crux of the case. Clausewitz could use the metaphysical arguments against the Enlightenment war theorists precisely because of the three layers of analysis we have here exposed. First, that the principles of war were assumed to exist prior even to being sought out, let alone found. Second, that the various antinomies of pure reason which, as we saw in the above chapter, war theories created produced an illusion of logic, because one could in fact argue for and or against virtually any positive doctrine, which reinforced the expectation that positive doctrines did in fact exist: *why else would we be arguing about them?* But that meant that every inch we got closer to them, they seemed to slip one or two more inches away. And finally, as this last quote from Clausewitz reminded us, when he speaks of the hand versus the tool, the material examples theorists referred to were merely conditions, the context of a demonstration, but not the demonstration itself, or the demonstration of an unconditional truth. If each element of certainty was indeed fixed to a single event in which it produced an outcome, then there was in fact nothing absolute or universal to it. It was this realization that allowed Clausewitz to pinpoint the role of critical

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<sup>199</sup> Idem.

judgment, and its only objective measure, *victory in battle*, as opposed to some peripheral object or quantity.<sup>200</sup>

To achieve this conclusion, Clausewitz had to peer into the problem through the lens of dialectical reasoning. He had to uncover the antinomies of pure reason and thereby perceive the positive doctrines as mere replicas of metaphysical speculation, to know that pursuing the Kantian argument against their perceived validity would work. Otherwise, these quotes he uses from Kant would all appear vague and off-context, when in fact they are extremely well used, and powerful to uncover the central weakness of Enlightenment thinking, and how it found its ways into the works of military writers.

## Conclusion

By asking the question, ‘what kind of sceptic was Clausewitz?’, we find that his way of thinking follows the path cleared by Hume and Kant, especially as it pertains to the link between causal relationships and certainty. In his refutations of the positive doctrines, Clausewitz shows a very significant indebtedness to Kant, especially to the *Critique of Pure Reason*. He was not merely ‘sounding Kantian’, he was applying the method in clear and logical way, which had a demonstrable effect the power of his refutation. Clausewitz was not countering any single positive doctrine, he was demonstrating why their contradictory nature made them inescapably invalid. And this he achieved by referencing various ideas and demonstrations found in Kant’s major works, as well as minor works.

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<sup>200</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, p. 354

This process depended on dialectical thinking. Clausewitz appreciation of Kant allowed him to perceive, though he did not state it so clearly, that the contradictions which existed between different sets of equally valid positive doctrines, albeit valid only in certain contexts, formed antinomies of reason, which could which Kant's *sceptical method* could uncover and discredit. If, as we saw in chapter one, these antinomies were caused by a surplus, rather than a lack of material proof, they nonetheless operated according to an identical form of logic, expectation, and validation, which was not only built on the premise of their assumed existence, but also further encouraged by the very quest for them, which generated arguments and analyses in which the principles were in fact residing. The principles existed only in these debates, and that is why they appeared so real to those who were busy arguing for and against each of their many forms.

That being said, however, we should remember what was said regarding the dialectic in this thesis's introduction: it is not a single method or concept, but rather implies various meaning clusters. This is also true in Clausewitz's work, and is best exemplified not in any single case, but in his overall comfort with divisions, contradictions, and paradoxes, which he did not shun, but actually elevated. In his refutation of the positive doctrines, Clausewitz did use a variety of different dialectical tools. He brought forward the analytic/synthetic division of knowledge; he exposed the antinomies of reason in contradicting positive doctrines; he distinguished noumena from phenomena and the conditioned from the unconditioned. In all of these, he was showing that he could be *reasonable about science, because he was making use of a science of reason*, and this sceptical method was in many different ways a dialectical method.

## Chapter Three – The Decay and Resilience of Positive Doctrines from Jomini to the 20<sup>th</sup> century

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We enter now a section of the essay where the purpose is to study the opposite of our topic, in order to shed more light on the topic itself. Clausewitz demonstrated very credibly that positive doctrines were not theoretically or practically sound, and yet, years after this argument was made, many nonetheless continued to hold on to and publish their own positive doctrines. Was Clausewitz wrong? By exploring how those who held on to positive doctrines did so by committing themselves to deep forms of illogic, we can uncover in a very clear and crisp way just how right Clausewitz had been to begin with.

In fact, Clausewitz's refutation of the positive doctrines was so successful, that it converted even the master of positive doctrines, Jomini, albeit kicking and screaming, until his new writings were mere shadows of his previous work. And Clausewitz's method did even more than that, it created a way of thinking about war that showcases to what extent those who refuse to let go of positive doctrines, even today, fall into a whirlwind of circular logic and a *reductio ad absurdum* way of thinking that is self-defeating. Illogic having a wonderful capacity to make its way into some of the most well-read and appreciated textbooks, it is perhaps not so surprising that positive doctrines did so well after they had been so effectively refuted,

because it seems that those who read and write such books want to believe in them: they want principles to exist at the intersection of their debates, because it justifies in their own eyes their work and passions.

This chapter comes down to two geometrical ideas: the angles 180° and 360°. The effect of dialectics *On War* theory's positive doctrines is analogous to what physicists call 'torque', the moment of force which sets an object into rotation. Whereas Jomini's discovery of Clausewitz forced him to 'pull a 180' and effectively renege almost everything he had once proclaimed in earlier works, later war theorists accumulated so much spin that they found themselves caught in a hopeless circular logic that descended into *reductio ad absurdum* illogic.

Despite this, not only did the positive doctrines not fade away immediately and entirely, they rose up furiously. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 'principles of war' had been elevated in the minds of many by the process of trying to reduce them to the simplest of lists: offense, manoeuvre, concentration, economy of force, liberty of action, certainty and initiative.<sup>201</sup> Unaware of the irony of their quest, theorists were in fact attempting to salvage the idea of 'principles of war', by what appears to be a strategy to apply these very principles onto themselves: concentrate them, make an economy of them, etc. These attempts to codify the non-codifiable had, according to Coutau-Bégarie, ended up completing a *full circle*, whereby they 'transformed their purpose from an explanatory set of principles to a principle of explanation'.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Hervé Coutau-Bégarie. *Traité de stratégie*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris : Économica, 1999), p. 280

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.* p. 280

## Swaying Jomini

Jomini was the last true enlightenment war theorist. His theories were ‘characterized by a highly didactic and prescriptive approach, conveyed in an extensive geometric vocabulary of strategic lines, bases, and key points.’<sup>203</sup> Scattered graphics, charts and maps were regularly used in his writings to ‘demonstrate’ and ‘prove’ various maxims, principles and positive doctrines. Yet, despite his techniques and argumentative approach, which were of an earlier time, when we compare Jomini’s first books to his later works, it becomes evident that something dramatic changed.

It is necessary to be categorical with regard to the argument made by various scholars suggesting that Clausewitz and Jomini were more often in agreement than not.<sup>204</sup> This is not by any means universally true. It is a consequence of Jomini having read Clausewitz. The foremost proponent of this view, Handel, only came to this conclusion because he was citing exclusively from Jomini’s *Précis sur l’art de la guerre*,<sup>205</sup> Jomini’s last major work, and not from his early works such as the *Traité*, published decades earlier. This is significant, because Jomini before and after Clausewitz is clearly a different war theorist. When scholars claim that Jomini and Clausewitz think alike, they must absolutely distinguish between the young and the old Jomini in order to clarify their stance, because the similarities appear only in Jomini’s later works, as a result of a significant turnaround in his point of view.

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<sup>203</sup> Christopher Bassford. *Clausewitz and Jomini: Their Interaction*, State University of Georgia, 1993. <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Jomini/JOMINIX.htm>

<sup>204</sup> Idem.

<sup>205</sup> See: Michael Handel. *Masters of War: Sun Tzu, Clausewitz and Jomini* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp. 74 122, 126, 127, 249, 370, 373.

In the *Précis*, for example, Jomini suddenly accords more importance to the moral and political factors of war, going so far as to make them the opening sequence of his book. Prior to reading Clausewitz, he had never placed any discussion of these matters so prominently. More dramatically still, his views and ideas about the ‘principles of war’, which were the heart of his systems, were fully warped in the process. For example, we know that in a late reprint of the *Traité*, Jomini ‘dropped his insistence on interior lines, acknowledging à la Clausewitz, though without actually mentioning it, that the value of interior or concentric lines depended on the situation’.<sup>206</sup>

Colson has argued that maturity alone can explain how Jomini’s ideas evolved from more extreme to more moderate.

The [later] *Précis* is an attempt to distil what can be learned from the Napoleonic Wars into considerations marked with a will to return to a more prudent strategy, where the objective is to occupy territory rather than destroying the enemy’s army. [...] The [earlier] *Treatise* reflected his admiration for Napoleon, Jomini arrived at a more methodical and territorial conception of strategy. [...] Having matured with age and witnessed the changing times, Jomini now opted for prudence and moderation.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> This is the case in a 1865 version of the *Treatise*, translated by Holabird (New York: Nostrand Ed. 1865). Noted in Christopher Bassford. *Clausewitz and Jomini: Their Interaction*, State University of Georgia, 1993. <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Jomini/JOMINIX.htm>

<sup>207</sup> Bruno Colson. ‘Présentation du *Précis de l’art de la guerre*’, in Jomini. *Précis de l’art de la guerre* (Paris: Perrin, 2001), p. 21.



The ‘maturity’ argument does not account for what is altogether new, such sudden insistence on moral and political factors, nor does it account for the severity of differences with regard to the positive doctrines found in the *Traité de la grande tactique*, written in 1802-1807 and the lack of them in his later treatise *Précis de l’art de la guerre*, written in 1838. The younger Jomini believed in the perfectibility of war theory, whereas later, he would renege this stance almost completely, sticking only to a few key concepts, at the expense of many others.

Gauging where and how Jomini changed his arguments around over time is quite a difficult task, given that he was re-editing his old works republishing them and not making any mention, footnote or explanation with regard to what these corrections were and where in fact he was making them. It is a puzzle. That being said, one can nonetheless get a partial picture, by looking at passages from a relatively early print of the *Traité* and the much the later *Précis*. The distinction is evident:

1 - (Traité de la grande tactique, 1805) L’idée de réduire le système de la guerre à une combinaison primitive dont toutes les autres dépendent, et qui ferait la base d’une théorie juste et simple, présente une foule d’avantages; elle rendrait l’instruction bien plus facile, le jugement des opérations toujours sain, et dès-lors les fautes moins fréquentes. Je crois que les généraux ne sauraient assez s’en pénétrer; qu’elle devrait diriger tous leurs projets, toutes leurs actions.<sup>208</sup>

[The idea of reducing systems of war into its primary combinations on which all others depend, and which would establish as a base an exact

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<sup>208</sup> Jomini. *Traité de la grande tactique* (Paris: Magimel, 1805), p 536

and simple theory, presents numerous advantages; it would improve instruction, improve judgements during operations, and consequently, lower the frequency of errors. I think generals could not make enough use of learning and applying it, that it should guide all their projects, all their actions.]

2 - (Précis de l'art de la guerre, 1838) Et si l'on rassemblait, sous la présidence de l'archiduc Charles ou de Wellington, un comité composé de toutes les notabilités stratégiques et tactiques du siècle, avec les habiles généraux du génie et de l'artillerie, ce comité ne parviendrait pas encore à faire une théorie parfaite, absolue et immuable, sur toutes les parties de la guerre, notamment sur la tactique!! [sic.]<sup>209</sup>

[Even if we were to form a committee, presided by the Archduke Charles or by Wellington, composed of all the notable strategists and tacticians of the century, with the most competent generals of engineering and artillery, this committee would still not achieve a perfect, absolute and immutable theory on the different aspects of war including tactics!!]

We might expect that maturity would cause one to perfect his or her argument, clarify its structure, enhance its demonstration, and perhaps make minor adjustments or concessions. What we see here is nothing of the sort, but rather a 180-degree turn-around in perspective. How did this change come about? Colson gives us two hints.

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<sup>209</sup> Jomini. *Précis de l'art de la guerre*, (Paris: Anselin Libraire, 1838 ), p. 33

Longevity had much to do with it, as well as the ‘changing times’ which he mentions in the above quote. Jomini lived to the ripe age of 90, which allowed his writing career to both precede and outlive Clausewitz’s. While Clausewitz was surrounded by new methods of dialectical reasoning, simply for being at the right place at the right time, the academic circles of Germany at the turn of the century, Jomini did not experience the radical change in how metaphysics had altered the way perfectibility and immutability of concepts should be conceived. In fact, it is said that Jomini was not particularly well-read beyond military textbooks. He would have been somewhat familiar with Montesquieu, and he had read Puységur, Lloyd, and Guibert in great detail, but he was unfamiliar with philosophy in general, and even less so of the current movements.<sup>210</sup>

As such, the method of reasoning he discovered in *On War* must have been quite shocking, perhaps even overwhelming. He was in fact ‘deeply wounded’<sup>211</sup> by what he discovered. These feelings are easily detected in his writing style, which breaks away from his typical didactical style, suddenly emboldened with anger and awe directed at Clausewitz. Seeming to accept that his earlier ideas now stood on wobbly grounds, Jomini began seeking out ways to reinforce key points, while delimiting or deleting others. That he began writing the *Précis* immediately after having come across Clausewitz should not come as a surprise. He had been personally attacked in it, and his reaction was clearly embittered. Within single paragraphs in which he discussed *On War*, he integrated a melodramatic and frantic mishmash of praise, insults and hints that he hoped to find reconciliation with the work of Clausewitz, even though these three goals were thoroughly contradictory. He

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<sup>210</sup> Jean-Jacques Langendorf, *Faire la guerre: Antoine-Henri Jomini*, Vol 2, (Geneva: Georg Éditeurs, 2004), p. 77-90.

<sup>211</sup> Christopher Bassford. *Jomini and Clausewitz, Their Interaction*.  
<http://www.clausewitz.com/CWZHOME/Jomini/JOMINIX.htm#JOMINI>

described Clausewitz and *On War* within a wide spectrum of qualifiers: ‘luminous ideas,’ ‘greatly instructed,’ ‘well written,’ ‘vagabond,’ ‘pretentious,’ ‘savant labyrinth,’ ‘sophism’ ‘frequently logically faulty,’ etc.<sup>212</sup> Uncertain of where he stood on Clausewitz, Jomini nonetheless wanted to protect his own works and arguments from this new theory, and trying to fix his ideas in reaction to Clausewitz. Pretentious to the finish, Jomini wrote in this new book that if only Clausewitz had lived long enough to read the *Précis*, he would have ‘accorded it some justice.’<sup>213</sup>

Jomini offered some mild refutations regarding Clausewitz’s stance that positive doctrines were invalid, but he did not try to undo the latter’s argument as a whole, probably because he recognized it, not as an entire truth, but at least a partial truth. Jomini ultimately turned his back on his old influences, Bülow and Lloyd. In the *Précis*, Jomini recalls the fact that these two authors had been so formative and important to his view regarding war that after reading them for the first time, in his youth, he thereafter burned all his previous essays, to start anew.<sup>214</sup> Yet, many years later after reading Clausewitz, his exaltation suddenly waivered, and he started distancing himself from the two. Indeed, in the same chapter of the *Précis* where he recalls this story of his youth, he also writes that Bülow and Lloyd had in fact only produced a few minor interesting elements, surrounded by dogmatic and wrong ideas. With regard to the latter, Jomini wrote:

[Lloyd] raised interesting questions about strategy, which he unfortunately buried in a maze of minute details on tactics and formations, and on the philosophy of war. While the author resolved

<sup>212</sup> Jomini. *Précis de l’art de la guerre* (Paris: Perrin, 2001), p. 9, 126, 137

<sup>213</sup> Jomini. *Précis de l’art de la guerre* (Paris: Anselin, librairie, 1838), p. 21

<sup>214</sup> Jomini. *Précis de l’art de la guerre*, (Bruxelles: Librairie Militaire de J-B Petit, 1841), p. 8

none of these questions in a way that could provide a system, we can at least say that he would point us in the right direction to take. The way he relates the Seven Years' War, of which he only completed two campaigns, was more instructive (to me at least) than all his dogmatic writings.<sup>215</sup>

As to the former, Bülow, Jomini also found new and tough words for him, stating that 'he builds upon an inexact foundation, and his works thus necessarily contained at times erroneous maxims.'<sup>216</sup> Clearly we find that if Jomini had in fact 'matured', this had little to do with age and much more to do with method and renunciation. Jomini had turned his back on the works which marked his youthful optimism in the power of scientific methods in war. In fact, by the end of the transition, Langendorf notes that Jomini not only 'attenuated his views',<sup>217</sup> he also 'no longer proposed absolute rules.'<sup>218</sup> The turnaround was complete.

### Fundamental Principles

The most dramatic aspect of Jomini's 180° is his transition with regard to principles and fundamental principles. Whereas the Treatise had a number of them scattered throughout, only a selected few remained in the Précis. The concentration of

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 6

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 79

<sup>217</sup> Langendorf. *Faire la guerre: Antoine-Henri Jomini*, p. 290.

<sup>218</sup> Langendorf. *Faire la guerre: Antoine-Henri Jomini*, p. 88.

principles after Clausewitz therefore happened first in Jomini, but it is a strategy that would be repeated well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as we shall see, further below.

The idea that war had a plural set of ‘fundamental principles’ was first written in the Treatise:

The Fundamental principles upon which rest all good combinations of war have always existed [...] These principles are unchangeable; they are independent of the nature of the arms employed, of times and places [...] For thirty centuries there have lived generals who have been more or less happy in their application [...] While comparing the causes of the victories of ancient and modern times, we are greatly surprised to discover that the battles of Wagram, Pharsalia and Cannae were gained from the same original cause.<sup>219</sup>

When he wrote the Précis, he did not forget entirely the concept of fundamental principles, but perhaps suffered from partial amnesia. Suddenly, the indeterminate number of fundamental principles had been qualified to being ‘few’ and further along, a single overarching fundamental principle of operations would tower above all others. Jomini was trying to recoil to safer argumentative grounds by pruning so many branches of his tree he found himself with a sapling:

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<sup>219</sup> Jomini. *Treatise of Grand Tactics* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1865), p. 445.

I agree that the absolute rules are few [...] I concur in good faith with this truth, but should this mean that there can be no theory? If out of 45 articles, one has 10 positive maxims, the other has one or two, is it not enough to have 150 to 200 rules to form a respectable body of strategic or tactical doctrine? And if you add to this the multitude of precepts that have occasional exceptions, would you not have more dogmas than necessary to fix your opinions on all the operations of war?<sup>220</sup>

A few pages later, Jomini adds:

My 20 years of experience, have fortified my conviction of the following: There exist a small number of fundamental principles in the art of war, which one could avoid only at his own peril, and quite to the contrary, application of these principles have practically always been crowned with success.<sup>221</sup>

Among the remaining true fundamental principles, Jomini held on to the existence of one single ‘fundamental principle of all operations in war.’<sup>222</sup> This fundamental principle consisted essentially of “bring[ing] forth, through strategic combinations, the bulk of the forces of an army, successively upon decisive points in a theatre of war [...] and] manoeuvr[ing] against fractions of the enemy army.”<sup>223</sup> Jomini concedes that the difficult part, of course, is to identify the ‘decisive points’

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<sup>220</sup> Jomini. *Précis de l'art de la guerre* (Paris: Perrin, 2001), p. 22

<sup>221</sup> Ibid. pp. 26-27

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. p. 157

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. p. 158

which he relegates to genius in war, or in this particular case, the ‘art’, or as he writes later in this subsection, ‘It will be up to the talent in execution, the know-how, the energy, the *coup-d’oeil*, to complete that which good combinations will have prepared.’<sup>224</sup> And finally, as an extra fortification around his principles, Jomini will gladly point to ‘exceptions’ to various rules on six different occasions.<sup>225</sup>

Though Clausewitz also speaks of key points in his works, he delimits their pretensions very clearly, then submits his analyses to ‘Kritik’, and at no moment does he make any claim to provide fundamental principles. For this reason alone, lack not only of ‘Kritik’ but even the possibility of ‘critiquing’, one might be tempted to dismiss Jomini’s argument above for having no proper theoretical test for its validity, discarded on the grounds that it is intellectually inadmissible, due to it being a hypothesis, which cannot be disproved. However there are a few examples from the Napoleonic Wars which we can turn to in order to isolate both of these variables at once, and demonstrate that not only was the one, single fundamental principle sophistical, it was in fact demonstrably wrong.

In fact, Jomini himself provides us with the very elements required to proceed to isolate the principle of ‘decisive points’ for empirical testing. Two examples appear in Jomini’s *Précis*: the first, individual commanders whose *coup d’oeil* and genius are unquestionable: Caesar, Frederick II and Napoleon;<sup>226</sup> and secondly, the question of state capitals, where Jomini writes, ‘All [state] capitals, since they are at the centre of a country’s roads, would be decisive, strategic points, not only for this reason, but also for statistical and political motives, which add to this importance.’ Hence, in certain cases, we can indeed find ourselves dealing with the principle itself, denuded of its

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid. p. 161

<sup>225</sup> Jomini. *Précis sur l’art de la guerre* (Bruxelles: J.B. Petit, 1841) pp. 36, 53, 72, 92, 114, 272

<sup>226</sup> Jomini. *Précis sur l’art de la guerre* (Paris: Perrin, 2001) pp. 12-13



expectations regarding genius and the nature of a ‘decisive point’. In Jomini’s own words, the capital is necessarily decisive, and Napoleon is necessarily a genius. Thus the objective principle itself is separated, isolated from its subjective components.

Clearly, the capture of Moscow is as damning a counter-argument as there can be. It did not prove to be a decisive event; it did not force political capitulation, nor did it break the enemy’s base, communications or reinforcements; actually, it precipitated the deterioration of France’s imperial power. Taking the capital became a decisive point in the defeat rather than the victory. Jomini, who was there at the time when it happened may have considered Moscow as an exception to the rules, but one cannot have it both ways, a fundamental principle is either universal, or else there is nothing *fundamental* to it.

### Jomini’s Genius

Jomini mastered like none other the ‘genius’ sophistry. He managed to hold the tenuous and circular point of view by which absolute rules existed, though genius in application of the rules was necessary to the art of war, insofar as this genius was not acting contrary to the rules to begin with. He had in fact turned the contradiction on its head. Though it appeared less contradictory in the process, the weakness of the argumentative structure would soon crumble, as the circularity of it produced a *reductio ad absurdum* illogic that would only run out of speed decades later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As it stood in Jomini's work, 'genius' played the role we saw above, as the ultimate theoretical stopgap for safeguarding absolute principles that were inherently flawed. Instead of admitting a flaw in theory, one could usually always shift blame away from the theory by striking at the artist or the tactician as opposed to the art or the tactic. The formulation Jomini makes of it is carefully constructed to even further enhance the sophisticated relationship between genius and the principles of war:

Genius has a great deal to do with success, since it presides over the application of recognized rules, and seizes, as it were, all the subtle shades of which their application is susceptible. But in any case, the man of genius does not act contrary to these rules.<sup>227</sup>

There are many highly confounding problems with the above statement, as it places genius both above the rules, presiding over them, while nonetheless also submitting to them, that is, not acting contrary to them. So which is it? Also it suggests that rules are both binding and formal, while also variable and to be applied according to context. One may be tempted to see in this great erudition, even a taste of dialectical complexity, but it is nothing of the sort. The double set of contradictory statements has no objective to improve our knowledge of either genius or principles, but only to muddle them enough to make any situation fit. Set up this way, the two are scientifically insignificant; they are a trap for rationality, whereby anything can be claimed to be genius, and anything can be claimed as a principle. We are stuck asking ourselves if one can be a genius if that simply means following the rules. And the

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid. Citing Jomini, *Treatise of Grand Tactics*, p. 253-254

opposite problem also surfaces: is there such thing as a principle if genius can rise above it?

Clausewitz again borrowed from Kant for a logical solution to this intellectual impasse. To begin with, the fact that he employed the term ‘Grundsatz’ rather than ‘Prinzip’ with regard to best practices in the battlefield allowed him more flexibility with his use of the concept of ‘genius’, because he was not seeking certainty, and that meant his theory could more easily accommodate situations that did not follow certain lessons of best practices that may have helped contribute to victory in another context. By referring to Kant, Clausewitz found a way for both genius and ‘Grundsätze’ to co-exist logically in all situations, which is the opposite of how Jomini set himself up: whenever genius and principles were both logical, it was because the context had allowed them both to be right concurrently, which means, on the victorious side of a war.

Clausewitz analysis of genius is taken straight out of the *Critique of Judgement*.<sup>228</sup> He used it very early in his life in the anonymous article he published in *Neue Bellona*, while studying under Kiesewetter. Far from showing a ‘homeopathic’ understanding of Kant, Clausewitz aptly used this concept of ‘genius’ in refuting Bülow’s geometric ‘rules’ of war. Clausewitz objected Bülow’s conception of ‘art’ on the grounds that it did not state a ‘goal’, which is an important aspect of Kant’s concept of art as ‘the use of given means to achieve a higher end.’<sup>229</sup> Paret explains, ‘[Clausewitz’s] teacher Kiesewetter chose familiar terminology when he defined genius as the union of imagination and reason, brought to life by spirit. Clausewitz adopted this definition, adding moral and physical courage to imagination

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<sup>228</sup> Gat. *The Origins of Military Thought*, p. 175

<sup>229</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement* (Oxford, 1961) p. 168. (Cited in Gat. *The Origin of Military Thought*, p. 175)

and reason to characterize military genius' (citing Kieseewetter; Clausewitz 'On Military Genius' *On War*).<sup>230</sup> Clausewitz had learned an idea written by Kant in the *Critique of Judgement*: that 'genius is the talent (natural ability) that establishes rules for the arts. Since this talent, as an innate creative ability of the artist, is itself part of nature, we might also express ourselves in this manner: Genius is the innate psychological power (ingenium) through which nature establishes rules for the arts' (citing Kant, *Critique of Judgement*).<sup>231</sup>

As long as war theory avoided absolute principles and complete positive doctrines, it could entertain and accommodate the notion of 'genius' in war. From maxims and examples of what succeeded in the past, the general could gauge the right course of action in battle. However, this relationship between 'genius' and 'principles' would become increasingly contradictory as theorists elaborated 'perfect' principles of war, which by virtue of their formulation, necessarily excluded the role of talent and art; yet, no theorist was actually willing to give up the role of genius and leadership altogether, creating an awkward relationship between the two, essentially downgrading 'talent' to the ability to follow the principles well, or alternatively, the ability to 'rise above' the principles. Either of these breaks the relation, since the former eliminates genius in trying to save it, and the latter undermines the perfectibility of principles, which was the initial purpose.

Jomini's sophistry worked for him, because he had always considered them from the perspective of the the victorious side. It should be noted that having fought alongside Napoleon up to Moscow, and turned his coat thereafter, Jomini was on the winning side throughout his entire military career. He knew tactical defeat on the

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<sup>230</sup> Paret. *Clausewitz and the State*, p 161

<sup>231</sup> Idem.

battlefield, but had no experience with strategic or total political defeat. Clausewitz had the opportunity to start juggling with the problem of genius and absolute principles years before, because he was analyzing these ideas from the perspective of the other side, the losing side, which bore the brunt of the revolutionary fervour. As he aptly put it years later in a letter to Roeder in 1827:

The exceptional circumstances in which Bonaparte and France found themselves since the Wars of the Revolution, allowed him to achieve major victories on almost every occasion, and people began to assume that the plans and actions created by those circumstances were universal norms.<sup>232</sup>

It was simple in this context to assume, from the victor's perspective that they were winning because the principles were right and the generals were geniuses, but the causality relation was more likely the absolute reverse of this: they thought their principles were right and that their generals were geniuses *because they happened to be winning*.

### Jomini in History

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<sup>232</sup> Clausewitz. 'Letter to Roeder, December 22, 1827', *Two Letters on Strategy*, Ed. Peter Paret and Daniel Moran, (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College, 1984)

While there are two different faces of Jomini, one before and one after Clausewitz, the man nonetheless occupies a single place in the history of war theory that is similar in many respects to Hume's place in philosophy. In both cases, they were the last of their breed: Hume the last Empiricist, and Jomini the last Enlightenment war theorist, both stuck at a paradoxical nexus where scepticism forces its way to the surface. The central reason for which they were last is that they had in their careful methodology achieved a point of contradiction. While Hume celebrated this as his purpose and his contribution to philosophy, Jomini preferred to fight it off as best he could, making concessions and diluting his work into an old memory of itself, rather than admit the existence of certain categories and limits to knowledge. And so, Hume was the harbinger of scepticism to his field, whereas Jomini accepted only as much scepticism as he was forced to by counter-arguments and historical incongruence in his former doctrines. Though Jomini changed in the process, he cannot be qualified as being 'post-Enlightenment' for the simple reason that he did not theorize in the new fashion, but simply deleted those aspects of his works where the weaknesses of his reasoning were most damning as a result of the transition. Much like Hume, Jomini did not relinquish the methods of the Enlightenment, but would eventually come to face an impossible threshold of scepticism which could not be escaped. Hume arrived at a similar place: keeping the method, but having to dilute the certainty of causality.

The arrival of dialectics represented a shift so powerful in war studies that it broke the very backbone of most of the theories of war which existed prior. Today, few are those who still quote Puysegur, Maizeroy and Guibert. Their geometrical and scientific theories became hopelessly dated. Among the Enlightenment thinkers, Jomini fared a bit better than the others and continues to have some minor uptake in

the field. However, this is *only* true of his later work, the Précis. His earlier Treatise is utterly forgotten. And none of the above authors comes close in numbers to the continued interest in Clausewitz. An interesting and effective way to gauge the use and popularity of these writers in contemporary academics is to use the Google Scholar search engine results for each. Two conclusions stand out: Clausewitz outnumbers the total of the others combined by a factor of 24; and were it not for Jomini's later work, written in reaction to Clausewitz, and which outnumbers his early work by a factor of ten to one, he too would have succumbed, like Puysegur and Guibert to quiet desuetude.

Search Term	Number of Pages (On July 12, 2011)
"Jomini Treatise on Grand Military Operations"	12
"Jomini Traité de grande tactique"	5
"Jomini The Art of War"	128
"Jomini Précis de l'art de la guerre"	58
« Puysegur Art of War »	0
"Puysegur Art de la guerre"	23
"Guibert A General Essay on Tactics"	5
"Guibert Essai general de tactique"	54
"Clausewitz <i>On War</i> "	6,120
"Clausewitz Vom Kriege"	775

While Jomini may have had the last word on Clausewitz, it seems that history had the last word on Jomini. That being said, history has nonetheless failed to have the last word on positive doctrines. Perhaps it is their simplicity of use which makes

them stick, because it is practical in the military arts to refer to maxims for making quick decisions. However, when we consider the difference between maxims and principles, it seems rather that the continuation of the latter may have more to do with personal egos, who are unsatisfied with only coining a good maxim... they would prefer proclaiming it an immutable principle for all the ages. But the risk of this is to either flirt with illogic as one tries to elevate 'genius' and 'principles' to a higher form of abstraction and contradiction in order to avoid having to come to terms with the impossibility of applying it concretely.

### The Descent of Principles into *Reductio ad Absurdum* Illogic

Despite the fact that Clausewitz's opus had been widely available for decades, the belief in positive doctrines did not subside but actually only reached its culminating point by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>233</sup> Though it was a widespread and worldwide tendency, we can turn to the American example to provide its archetypal form. True to the philosophy of Jomini's later works, US Army field manuals did not proclaim perfect solutions to specific situations, but they nonetheless maintained an increasingly narrow set of fundamental principles, such as the 'principle of concentration' and the 'principle of economy of force.'<sup>234</sup> The problem was that the greater the dilution of principles into such wide, vague or unapplied categories, coupled with an even greater sense of certainty as a result of their higher scope, the more complete the full circle of the logic became. By the time circular motion reached

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<sup>233</sup> Brodie. *Introduction to Clausewitz, On War*, p. 50

<sup>234</sup> Idem.



its end, principles of war had come to a stagnant halt, where they had effectively done away with the role of genius altogether. Genius could no longer rise above the rule. Genius could no longer make the rule. Genius and its ‘coup d’oeil’ could no longer serve as the go-to point for when principles failed. The fact was that genius had been replaced by its very opposite: common sense.

Bernard Brodie said it best, during a conference in 1952 in which he explained:

If by principles, we mean these maxims and axioms usually grouped in a list of seven to ten or more articles, considered immutable despite fantastic changes in everything else, then my sentiment is not that these are false or without utility, but that we have a tendency to accord them too much importance. And if this tendency becomes extreme and we elevate these principles to dogma, then they can become positively dangerous. What needs to be said about so-called principles of war is that above all they are propositions of common sense.<sup>235</sup>

If ‘principles’ are meant to represent something grand, but do not manage to raise themselves above the realm of common sense, or the most basic assumptions one might have on conducting a strategy, then in what sense is their proclamation useful? In Foch’s *Principes de la guerre* (1903), he argued that were it not for such

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<sup>235</sup> Brodie, Bernard. Conference held on 17 March 1952 at the Naval War College (USA). The passage is not perfectly quoted. While the meaning is maintained, the words may have been altered due to a process of double translation. (originally quoted in : Poirier, L. *Les voix de la stratégie*, p. 92.)

immutable principles existing, war could not be an art. Yet, at the same time, Foch's principles were 'of variable application which follow circumstances',<sup>236</sup> depending above all on his overarching idea that 'no strategy can prevail against one which assures itself in, and aims for, victory in battle.'<sup>237</sup> He essentially posited both the absoluteness of principles and their variable application at the hands of the strategist,<sup>238</sup> thereby reaching an almost complete emptiness of significance. If that which is absolute is also variable, then it is in effect nothing.

Thus, the full circle described by Coutau-Bégarie began with the realization that strategists needed some fundamentals and notions of a probable code of conduct, however, as the process reached its end, it had effectively created principles that were so immutable and certain that they depended on artful application by the strategist to be of any use to the outcome sought. The more strategy was elevated by theorists, the more its true meaning was relegated to the level of timely and smart leadership.

Granted, common sense is not something that is useless in battle, nor is that what is being implied here. Rather, if genius and principles are *nothing but* propositions of common sense then we should not claim that they form either a science or even an art, let alone represent something immutable one for the ages. What generates uselessness is not the common sense itself, but the grand proclamations regarding tactics and strategy that have become so diluted as to mean altogether very little that is applicable or of use to one's common sense on the battlefield. In Van Creveld's *Transformation of War* for example, we read:

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<sup>236</sup> Foch. *Des principes de la guerre*, p. 9

<sup>237</sup> *ibid.* p. 41

<sup>238</sup> Cormier, Y. *Reclaiming the Dialectic in the Study of War*, M.A. thesis, deposited with the Canadian Department of National Defence, 2006. p. 14

Strategy derives its unique power from the fact that it is independent from the size of the conflict, the medium in which it takes place, the means by which it is fought, and even the amount of violence it involves. [...] Strategy does not give a hoot whether the conflict is fought with guided missiles, rifles, spears or colored beans.<sup>239</sup>

Another similar point of view is proposed in a section of Colin Gray's *Modern Strategy* entitled 'Strategy Eternal':

The near paradox lies in the fact that, although the multi-layering of new concerns for the strategist has proceeded apace, with the air, the depths of the sea, outer space, the electro-magnetic spectrum (and cyberspace) – as well as nuclear weapons and irregular warfare – adding complication upon complication, nothing essential about war and strategy has changed.<sup>240</sup>

Depending on what is implied by the word 'strategy' these statements are either completely false, or else have so diluted the concept of strategy, to the point that it is interchangeable over thousands of years, that if it is true, it is only so in reverse proportion to just how insignificant the word 'strategy' has become in the process of making the point. The hoplite and the thermonuclear bomb are not merely tactically incomparable; they are strategically so distant from one another as to

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<sup>239</sup> Martin Van Creveld. *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991) p. 118-119

<sup>240</sup> Colin Gray. *Modern Strategy* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 355-356

undermine the very notion of eternal strategy. The hoplite is a powerful weapon insofar as it is used. It pierces the battlefield. The thermonuclear weapon is only powerful insofar as no use is made of it. It negates, or obliterates, the very existence of a battlefield. Meanwhile, the idea that the networks of cyberspace can possibly be compatible with strategic notions of Euclidian geometry, bases and lines is altogether laughable. For example, a proper cyber attack is multidimensional, it cannot be conceived in simple geometry. One might be tempted to describe the internet connection between hacker and hacking victim as a line of operation or a supply line, but this is of little use since it the very multitude of non-linear, web-like attack means that disrupting one line is offset in the immediate by increasing the use of another. Tactically and strategically it offers no solution to the problem. And whether encryption should be understood as fortification would also merely confuse the issue and provide a rather stretched analogy. The closer to formulating an absolutely 'true' principle one gets; the further removed, abstract this principle must become. And reciprocally, the closer a principle is to any actual context, the less likely they are to be accurate as an overarching concept that can apply to other contexts. It is analogous to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics, and also a demonstration of what Brodie and Couteau-Bégarie meant when they first engaged with the circularity of the problem. Ultimately, by claiming to be everything, these principles become nothing at all.

## Conclusion

To sum up, Clausewitz's exploration of positive doctrines introduced a spin to the quest for principles of war. Jomini nearly completed a 180 degree turn, and those who continued the quest well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century began spinning uncontrollably into a spiral descent, in their attempt to elevate the principles ever more.

The proponents of positive doctrines attempted to increase the potency of their principles through dilution, as though they had homeopathic properties. The more perfected and simplified the principle, the more abstracted and irrelevant it becomes to everyday usage. The work of bringing it back down to reality is greater than the effort required for common sense to arrive at the same dictates for a particular situation. Its plural conditionality is a constant reminder that none of it is singularly unconditional, and those that may appear so are merely illusions of logic, propped up by a fortuitous encounter with occasional rectitude, which was not the cause of victory, but actually the product of victory.

Clausewitz's use of Kantian dialectics, his appreciation of Kant's notion of 'genius', coupled with his understanding of the distinction between synthetic and analytic knowledge contributed to the line or argument that certain Enlightenment thinkers had, against the rising tide of positive doctrines: that they don't work. The Enlightenment theorists knew it from experience. That was why they kept disagreeing with one other or burning their own volumes, like Jomini, when they couldn't even agree with themselves. In his refutation, Clausewitz demonstrated by opposing contradictions and extracting his limited theory of war that these disagreements were in fact inescapable, the product of the endemic lack of scepticism found in enlightenment thinking. Ever since then, every attempt to reclaim the lost glory days of positive doctrines is a reminder of this one truth, that they cannot climb out of the abyss into which Clausewitz threw them.



## Chapter 4 – Real & Absolute War: The Second Dialectical Moment

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Now that we have seen what Clausewitz's dialectical war theory destroyed in its path, let us consider what it built. When it comes to the two practical levels of warfare, the tactical and the strategic, Clausewitz's answer to this plural question regarding how generals should carry out war, in all its different facets (i.e. manoeuvres, logistics, combat, etc.) was a single, unitary solution: theory of war must have a limited scope. This reply to the positive doctrines is opposite to how Clausewitz analyzes the single, unitary question: "what is war?" Here, it is the answer rather than the question that takes on a plural form. Clausewitz argues that all wars contain two mutually exclusive and polarized concepts: 'real war' and 'absolute war'. Whereas his refutation of the positive doctrines involved many layers of dialectical reasoning to achieve its results, the dichotomous break up between the real and the absolute represents the culmination of the method, it is in fact the overarching dialectic in itself. By applying it to war in the way that Kant had applied it to philosophy, Clausewitz provided his overall theory war with a dialectical ontology, thus building something altogether new and original.

But what did these two opposite poles mean? Was it that 'absolute war' should be understood as war's true form, its natural form, and 'real war' is simply the

consequence of policies meant to hold back and limit war, as though war were a wild animal, and the government its cage? Or is it the other way around, there is real war, understood as limited war, and then Clausewitz, by positing the notion of an ‘absolute war’ unleashes a new and potent nightmare for governments to dream up? Or is it rather that both forms are equally political, where it is politics that push war to a standstill or to an all-out struggle?

Again, it is important to understand the Kantian element to this system in order to show how Clausewitz could use it to enhance and clarify ideas that he intuitively felt were right, even at a young age, but which he could not until then demonstrate objectively. In fact, the more we explore the depth of the Kantian influence in the absolute/real dichotomy, the less we shall be inclined to perceive it as a *subjective* concept based on Clausewitz’s experiences, state of mind, prejudices, or a change in perspective on the question. Rather, the split between the ideal and real represented for Clausewitz an opportunity to help him develop the subjective theory of his youth into a more comprehensive and far more objective theory in his later life.

It comes down to a question of which what came first, the chicken or the egg. Did Clausewitz reread history and stumble upon examples of real or absolute wars, leading to the dialectic, or was his discovery of the dialectic what pushed him to discuss war as having a real and an absolute side to it? While one could seek out with great effort proof that the former option is the valid one, intuitively, the latter option appears the more logical assumption. Ockham’s razor, if you will. That being said, intuition need not be where this argument ends. What happened right after the note of 1827 confirms it. Aron points out in surprise, a ‘véritable incertitude’,<sup>241</sup> so he

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<sup>241</sup> Raymond Aron, ‘Clausewitz et l’état,’ *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 32e Année, No. 6 (Nov. - Dec., 1977), p. 1259.



explains, that after having written the note of 1827 instead of getting right to work on its objective, Clausewitz instead suddenly showed a renewed interest in writing military campaigns. This is only surprising because Aron is seeing it from the opposite viewpoint. If the method came first, and the content came next, then it makes perfect sense that Clausewitz would have returned to his books exactly when he did.

Far from reneging on his old ideas on extremes and standstills, he saw the two as fitting perfectly into a Kantian framework insofar as he could conceptualize war in a dialectic between the ideal form and the real form. Not only did the dichotomy co-exist, in many ways it needed to co-exist for war to be intelligible rationally. By integrating the dialectic, it became possible better to explain the contradictions and paradoxes which he had come across early in life: the fact that war can take on an all-out form or a standstill, as well as the relationship between politics and war. Far from changing his horse mid-course, Clausewitz understood that attaching his chariot to two horses would provide him twice the power. Clausewitz was far too well read accidentally to fall upon the dialectical approach to shaping his considerations, and his clear understanding of the method excludes the possibility that he was stumbling about in self-contradictions and confusion. The paradoxes are planned and intellectually potent.

### Clarifying the Terms: ‘Absolute War’ not ‘Total War’

A central problem with recent interpretations of Clausewitz has its origins in a gross translation error committed by Howard/Paret, in which they attribute to Clausewitz the notion of ‘total war,’ a term and concept that was not actually coined

for another 100 years, and one which, when it appears in Clausewitz suddenly lends itself to the even more problematic error of switching between ‘absolute war’ and ‘total war’ as though they were equivalent. To be clear, the Howard/Paret translation did not actually make the latter error, thankfully, but the very fact of having introduced the anachronism has caused many others, including Van Creveld to fall head first into the trap of switching the two concepts around indiscriminately.

The passage in question is found in Book VIII chapter 6-b.

Even if war were **total war**, the pure element of enmity unleashed, all factors that go to make up war and determine its salient features – the strength and allies of each antagonist, the character of the peoples, and their governments, and so forth...<sup>242</sup>

Clausewitz never wrote the term ‘total war’ [*totale Krieg*]. The original German passage starts this way: ‘*Diese Vorstellungsart würde selbst dann unentbehrlich sein, wenn der **Krieg ganz Krieg** [...]*’ It actually reads much like the English expression ‘girly-girl’ where the superlative is found in repetition, so in this case we are dealing with something the phrase a ‘war of all wars’, with no reference to *totality* at all. Though the Graham translation also fails to present the term as a repetition, the advantage of having chosen the words ‘perfect war’<sup>243</sup> is that at least here, it is not generating the connotations which have become associated with total war. The Graham translation, first published in 1873 preceded the arrival of the term

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<sup>242</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, tr. Howard/Paret, Bk. VIII, Ch. 6B, pp. 605-606

<sup>243</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 6B, p. 675

‘total war’ by many decades, when, in 1935 the term ‘total war’ was first used by the German General Erich Ludendorff, as the title of his 1935 book ‘Der Totale Krieg’.

The problem with introducing ‘total war’ in Clausewitz is that the term is usually understood as a very real thing, the mobilization of an entire country, its people and its industrial production capacity towards the war effort, in which the objective is to completely annihilate the enemy’s capacity to resist. It is important to understand total war and absolute war as ‘unrelated concepts,’<sup>244</sup> where the latter is purely conceptual and unlimited and the former is purely material and entirely limited by the capacity of the nation to mobilize to its maximum potential. By switching the two around, we undermine the value of absolute war as an idea, because we are limiting it, when in fact the very reason for its existence is to serve as an unlimited concept. Whereas total war may be the very worst type of war we can generate, absolute war is the very worst type of war we can dream up.

Echevarria, emphasizes the fact that ‘the term absolute war captures the idea of limitless escalation, but this idea is not associated with real war.’ Actually, the closest Clausewitz ever got to including the word total in his analysis of ‘absolute war’ was not in regard to any totality of war, but in the exact opposite: to show that it was merely a concept, an idea. In an earlier draft of his manuscript, Echevarria notes, Clausewitz used the term ‘total-concept’ [Total-Begriff] to clarify the uniquely conceptual significance of the term, which is ‘barely conceivable in the purely logical sense’.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Christopher Bassford. *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815-1945* [http://www.clausewitz.com/CWZHOME/Bassford/Chapter15.htm#N\\_6](http://www.clausewitz.com/CWZHOME/Bassford/Chapter15.htm#N_6)

<sup>245</sup> Antulio J. Echevarria. *Clausewitz & Contemporary War* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 67

It is useful to take a step back, with regard to ‘absolute war’. Though it has been the one term that has fueled the most aggressive and systematic attacks on Clausewitz ever since, it should be noted that Clausewitz only used the term four times in the entire opus. If we also add the few other variants which he makes, such as war’s ‘absolute character’ and war’s ‘absolute form’, we find ourselves with a grand total of ten occurrences, or roughly 20 words out of 800 pages. Furthermore, where he does write ‘absolute War’, on the first occasion he practically apologizes for it; on the second occasion he presents it as only a ‘concept’; on the third, talks about the ‘probability’ of ‘approaching’ it as opposed to actually fighting with the ideal as one’s objective; and on the fourth, he writes that to ‘dwell’ on it would be to condemn one’s theory to falsehood. That is to say he takes this idea not just with a grain of salt, but perhaps more like a shovelful.

### The Missing Dialectics I: Did Clausewitz suddenly change his mind?

The fact that Clausewitz was so uncomfortable with the concept of an absolute war, and that he was altogether reticent about using it or giving it much credence explains why he would need to significantly counter it with an opposite ‘real’ war. It is often assumed that absolute war was something that the young Clausewitz thought up and that in his later life, a more mature and moderate man, he would reconsider his stance and integrate the limiting features embodied in the notion of real war. This assumption, however, breaks down with closer scrutiny. Real war is a term he had been using for ages, whereas it was absolute war that suddenly appeared later in his writings and in the process, also redefined his ideas on the meaning of real war. This

was the challenge and not the other way around, and it also explains at least in part why a complete re-edit of *On War* was required in order to make it coherent, or at least consistent, from cover to cover.

Van Creveld, for example, makes the case that Clausewitz's integrated the idea of 'limited war' as a last-minute change of mind, and as a result of his premature death, it was an idea that was never fully developed into *On War*.<sup>246</sup> There are many problems to this argument, the most obvious being the word choice: Clausewitz never actually talked about 'limited war' at all. He discussed limited aims in war, standstills, and extremes, but the distinction was 'absolute' war and 'real' war, not the limited/total war dichotomy that Van Creveld sets up as if they are synonymous. The point he is trying to make is that real war came first, and absolute war came second, though he speaks of a limited war / total war dichotomy which doesn't in fact exist in the literature.

Let us recall that the original dichotomy is as follows: Absolute war is the concept of what a war might be if it had no material or political restraints, if it was left entirely to the internal escalatory logic that violence generates when it is unleashed and begets a process of reciprocation towards extremes. Real war, on the other hand, is war as it exists materially, somewhere between a standstill and an all-out fight to the finish. Limited aims in war are simply one of many factors that will guide war into whichever form it takes materially.

The hidden problem with Van Creveld's argument, however is not language, it is history. He claims that the concept of real or limited war emerge in the works of Clausewitz at a later date, whereas absolute war was there from a much earlier time. But this is simply not true. 'Absolute war' is what was added later in the game, and

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<sup>246</sup> Martin Van Creveld. *The Art of War* (London: Cassell, 2000) pp. 114-118

what came last was the systematic study of the two, in comparison and reciprocation. To be certain of this, one needs only search quickly where the two terms appear in *On War*: ‘Real war’ can be found in Books I (ch2), III, V, VI, VIII, whereas all three variants ‘absolute war’, the ‘absolute form’, and the ‘absolute character’ of war are exclusively mentioned in Books VI and VIII. From this, knowing that Clausewitz wrote the books in sequence and had the time to review only the first parts of Book I to satisfaction, it is clear that given the many references to ‘real war’ in practically every segment of the book, while ‘absolute war’ in fewer places and exclusively in later parts, that ‘real’ came first and ‘absolute’ second, not the other way around.

The same faulty observation was also made by Paret, who made the case, citing passages from Clausewitz’s early books, *Principles of War* and *Plan of Operations*, that absolute war was an early concept. But he bases this assumption on the decision to accord to the words ‘utmost’ and ‘absolute’ complete interchangeability,<sup>247</sup> notwithstanding the fact that the two were written some twenty years apart. If we look at the passages Paret uses to make suggest that young Clausewitz had ‘absolute’ war on his mind, it becomes clear that the argument is tenuous. While Clausewitz did in fact argue that in war, ‘the most decisive operations accord with the nature of war’,<sup>248</sup> and that one should use his entire forces with the ‘utmost energy’,<sup>249</sup> he in no way mentions or develops anything immaterial or totally conceptual, along the lines of absolute war. In fact, the word ‘absolute war’ does it appear anywhere in these early works. This is not surprising, given that he did not

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<sup>247</sup> Peter Paret. ‘The Genesis of *On War*’, in Clausewitz, *On War*, tr. Howard/Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 20

<sup>248</sup> Clausewitz, *Plan of Operations*, 1804, pp. 51-52 (citation from Paret, *The Genesis of On War*, p. 20),

<sup>249</sup> Clausewitz, *Principles of War* (New York: Dover, 2003), p. 46

come across the concept ‘absolute war’ for another five years.<sup>250</sup> Though we might observe a seed, which would explain why he adopted the idea once he came across it, the observations regarding the use of ‘utmost energy’ are tactical, not ontological. Absolute war for Clausewitz is a hypothetical concept based on the rhetorical question, ‘what if war had no material limits?’ The above items are contrary to this because they are only concerned with material manifestations of war. And so, while Clausewitz had begun years earlier to conceptualize war as having extremes, it was not until he started thinking in ‘absolute’ terms that he chose to reframe the conceptual counterpoise to this, thus the renewed interest, which suddenly appears in the late chapters of *On War*, in war’s limited aims and the paradoxical relationship between waging wars of political extermination versus wars for bargaining a peace, a contradiction he had been considering as early as 1804.<sup>251</sup> Until the dialectic kicked in, Clausewitz understood war as merely ‘real’ war, and eventually, when he discovered absolute war, he generated a system which countered the real against the absolute, with unlimited and limited political aims serving as the moderators and accelerators of the dynamics between the more extreme and less extreme forms of war. This evolution shows Clausewitz become a more experienced and talented dialectician over time.

Interestingly, the way Clausewitz used the term ‘real war’ in the early parts of *On War* (books III to V, or up to the mid-section of VI) is quite different from the meaning it takes on after ‘absolute war’ was introduced (End of VI, VII, VII and I, ch 1). In Book V, for example, ‘real war’ is used in refutation to positive doctrines regarding base lines, and Clausewitz is saying that these theories don’t apply in ‘real

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<sup>250</sup> The letter to Fichte was written in 1809. I will go deeper into the question in the coming section ‘Absolute War & Revolution’.

<sup>251</sup> Clausewitz. *Plan of Operations*, 1804, p. 51 (citation from Paret, *The Genesis of On War*, p. 21)

war.’<sup>252</sup> In this case, the word real has nothing conceptual to it, but is merely a rhetorical tool to undermine the *unrealness* of the other term. Otherwise, in Book III, Clausewitz writes that ‘real war’ is the state of crisis on the battlefield, as opposed to the standstills.<sup>253</sup> Here the term is being used in very static, or unitary way, where the meaning of real war is something in particular, the actual fighting in war, as opposed to something paradoxical and fluid, which war actually encompasses all of the forms war can take, from the standstill at one end to the all out struggle at the other. Indeed, once we push forward to the end of Book VI, where ‘absolute war’ is finally introduced, then ‘real war’ suddenly changes in scope. It becomes a concept in flux between various forms. Clausewitz spells this out, ‘Real war will generally be in a medium between the two different tendencies, sometimes approaching nearer to one, sometimes to the other.’<sup>254</sup> Later, in Book VIII, Clausewitz adds that ‘real war is no such consistent effort tending to an extreme, as it should be according to the abstract idea, but a half and half thing, a contradiction in itself.’<sup>255</sup>

The confusion is that when Clausewitz integrated the concept of absolute war, he realized that the relationship this conceptual thing had to ‘real’ war was quite problematic. Can the absolute tend towards becoming materialized? If the political nature of war were to be proven through this dichotomy, then that also would give proper reason to go back and edit the early parts of the book. And so, what Clausewitz had was not a sudden turnaround, a change of heart that led him to appreciate the lighter side of war, but the opposite, a realization regarding the potentiality for war’s extremes and absolutes, which forced him to reconsider ‘real war’ from the perspective of this conceptual duality. In effect, ‘real war’ had suddenly become

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<sup>252</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. V, Ch. 15, p. 339

<sup>253</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. III, Ch. 18, p. 186

<sup>254</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VI, Ch. 30, p. 547

<sup>255</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 6B, p. 675



arguably *more* real, in opposition to the ideal form, but also, paradoxically, less tangible too, because it was no longer a fixed concept, but a fluid one with variants. The order in which Clausewitz developed the real war/absolute war dichotomy has been regularly misrepresented in the field, and the fact that this has been thoroughly turned around changes our understanding of the concepts involved.

Whereas the young Clausewitz knew that in war there were extremes and standstills, he could not make these fit together as belonging to a single logic until he had broken war into its actual and ideal forms, and it was this conception of war that allowed him to place existing contradictions in war into a higher level of analysis which made them logically connected despite their opposition. Clausewitz did not suddenly change his mind about war. He simply freed the dialectic, letting it encompass the real contradictions, such as wars tending towards both standstills and extremes, by allowing a higher level of conception to frame war.

### The Missing Dialectics II: Was Clausewitz in disagreement with himself?

Not everyone appreciates the art of thinking in paradoxes. We saw in the early pages of this thesis that reading Clausewitz without a dialectical lens has led to self-fulfilling prophecies and war doctrines that advocate pre-emptive extremes. It was simple in the case of Foch and Liddell Hart to demonstrate that they had grossly split apart the dialectic in order to focus on isolated poles, which were not conceived to

stand alone. However, showing that a new generation of authors have more or less replicated the error of excluding the dialectic is more difficult, because they do in fact recognize that both poles exist, and they write with more care and erudition, but they nonetheless fall into the trap of making a superficial interpretation of them which undermines the role that the dialectic played in Clausewitz's thought.

Whereas interpreters at the turn of the century had seemingly forgotten the concept of 'real war' altogether, today, some authors do not properly recognize the dichotomy as a thing in itself, a necessary relationship, and a demonstration of Clausewitz's talents as a dialectician, as opposed to a case of schizophrenic self-disagreements or intellectual weakness that leads him to contradict himself from cover to cover. It is rather the norm, not the exception to point out these contradictions disparagingly, even among scholars who are not unsympathetic to Clausewitz, as we saw in Gallie above, or in Heuser's *Reading Clausewitz*, where she writes, 'even [my emphasis] in his contradictions, [Clausewitz] shows great wisdom'.<sup>256</sup> This begs the question, however, was Clausewitz's wisdom rather not that he could conceptualize war within the context of such inherent contradictions? In fact, the way Clausewitz plans and executes contradictions –the source of his real/absolute dichotomy as well as various other examples in *On War* where paradoxes are drawn out – is a trick he learned from Kant. In fact, not only are they to be contradictory, they are meant to be *as contradictory as possible*, fully mutually exclusive conceptual pairs, which showcase the effects of antinomies of reason. When Clausewitz describes one thing, then its opposite, he replicates a technique that Kant uses, which Gallie describes particularly well in *Philosophers of War*:

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<sup>256</sup> Beatrice Heuser. *Reading Clausewitz* (London: Pimlico, 2002), p. 42

The principle of division should be stated in the sharpest, most extreme possible form [...] once our principle of division has been established in this extreme, unmistakable form, then we can safely consider any factors which may seem to modify it in particular cases. Clausewitz uses this methodological principle at every stage of his thought, up to his final revision of Book I, chapter I in order to distinguish war from other forms of organized social action; and the result is his idea of absolute war.<sup>257</sup>

However, what is more interesting still, within this method, is that within these paradoxes, Clausewitz is able to show that both opposite propositions can in fact be simultaneously true. Kant explained in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that conflicts in the laws of pure reason (antinomies) produce such two-way splits [Zwiespalt],<sup>258</sup> and Clausewitz did in fact integrate this observation, even making use of the word ‘Zwiespalt’ itself to clarify his exposition of the real/absolute dichotomy:

HAVING made the requisite examination on both sides of that state of antagonism [**Zwiespalt**] in which the nature of war stands with relation to other interests of men individually and of the bond of society, in order not to neglect any of the opposing elements,—an antagonism

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<sup>257</sup> Gallie. *Philosophers of War and Peace*, p 52

<sup>258</sup> Immanuel Kant. *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, First Edition, ed. Gerd Bouillon (Chapel Hill: Projekt Gutenberg, 2004), ebook location 3978

[**Zwiespalt**] which is founded in our own nature, and which, therefore, no philosophy [philosophische Verstand] can unravel.<sup>259</sup>

The division between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘real’ is, Hutchings explains, ‘fraught with paradox, as Kant himself recognizes, and none of the ways in which Kant grounds a connection [...] is genuinely secure.’<sup>260</sup> Indeed, this is alluded to by the fact that Clausewitz is saying that no philosophy can unravel it. That being said, what is lost in translation is that Clausewitz does in fact take the time to qualify *which type* of philosophy (*Verstand*) cannot unravel it, which suggests that he has plans down the line to propose an alternative philosophy to do the job. This quite a complex item to deal with, and we shall soon return to it later in this thesis. What is clear though, is that while these paradoxical tensions are planned and purposeful, they nonetheless represent a difficulty not only to the reader, but also in fact to Clausewitz himself. In writing about the impasse, Clausewitz found it quite difficult to cope with distinguishing the ideal from the real, especially in the context of Napoleon, who seemed to push war so far towards its absolute form that the paradox was all the more frustrating and fragile.

Clausewitz’s goal in bringing up the contradiction between absolute and real war was to try to make sense of another underlying contradiction he had experienced in his own life: how the single concept ‘war’ has on the one hand a tendency towards a ‘struggle for life and death’, while also being capable of provoking a mere ‘state of observation’ between the two opposing forces, or a standstill.<sup>261</sup> And more confusing

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<sup>259</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 6B, p. 674

<sup>260</sup> Kimberley Hutchings. *Kant, Critique and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 55

<sup>261</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VI, Ch. 28, p. 530.

still, how is it possible that each single, particular war is equally infused with this paradox? Clausewitz had no intention of somehow bypassing or avoiding it, but this meant that dealing with the contradiction meant he might himself sound contradictory in the process.

In *Reading Clausewitz* Heuser asks the rhetorical question, ‘How could Clausewitz state dogmatically that “The shattering of the enemy is the aim of war”, requiring the “annihilation of the inimical armed forces”, if two lines later he realized that the objective could be anything on a wide scale of political objectives? If only an insignificant patch of territory is to be conquered in time for political negotiations, surely it is not necessary to destroy the enemy’s entire fighting forces to do so. This passage thus shows the continued coexistence of his two different mind-frames.’<sup>262</sup>

Heuser goes so far as to entitle her chapter ‘Clausewitz the Realist vs. Clausewitz the Idealist’, as though the conflicting ‘mind-frames’ were somehow a personal disposition, rather than an intellectual system of analysis. If it is a bit anachronistic to frame Clausewitz in such 20<sup>th</sup> century academic terms, it is not without merit, because it does in fact have a highly heuristic value, insofar as it helps us understand Clausewitz from a crisp perspective with which we are familiar. It establishes compartments to how we should understand the lessons one can take from Clausewitz. However, this ‘perspective’ into Clausewitz is not unproblematic either, since it frames his work by attaching it to an external set of concepts. The danger is that we wind up bypassing *On War*’s planned complexities by extracting the contradictions as they appear from our external framework. Clausewitz is not necessarily contradicting himself, if he is in fact exposing self-contradictions in war itself. In the chapter that precedes the one Heuser is quoting from, Clausewitz

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<sup>262</sup> Heuser. *Reading Clausewitz*, p. 33

explains that war has ‘inner laws’<sup>263</sup> so that even though a nation may not have to annihilate another in order to take over a small territory, this does not eliminate the propensity of war to rise to extremes. In fact, is it not fair to say that many great wars started with a minor dispute? Within this reality, the political element is *both* the driver and the moderator of this propensity to extremes. Once we realize this, the contradiction which Heuser speaks of dissipates. War’s absolute and real natures are both accounted for in how Clausewitz describes war. They are interconnected. This does not mean that a limited war does not have something intrinsically absolute to it, nor does it mean that the closest one might get to waging an absolute war would not equally contain elements that would limit it from ever reaching this conceptual endpoint, which is stated as an unlimited ideal, and not a fixed and attainable point. To use a mathematical analogy, real war is imbued with both an absolute element and a limited element which are like asymptotic lines on a chart that never reach the point towards which they tend, in this case, because they are opposite forces exerting a constant pull against either approaching its end.

The problem in Heuser’s reading of ‘twos’ in Clausewitz is that her text does not properly distinguish dialectics from dualism.

[Clausewitz] almost falls into a new trap, that of thinking of war dualistically, as one of merely two possible forms: limited or unlimited. [...] back in 1804, Clausewitz had not yet believed that the conduct of war might vary as a function of its political aims. In a note of 1827, however, [...] he again invoked the ‘dual nature of war’. This curiously dualistic

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<sup>263</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. I, Ch. 1, pp. 4-5

notion [...] almost led Clausewitz to the logical dead end of thinking of war as one of two possible manifestations. His own logic, however, led him to acknowledge elsewhere that wars have to be classified along a sliding scale, from defensive but unlimited [...] via very limited [...] to an all-out unlimited [...] war of conquest.<sup>264</sup>

Heuser is right to point out that Clausewitz describes war as a dual concept as well as a sliding scale of manifestations. It is not, however, a contradiction in terms. To use an analogy, when a couple engages in a love-hate relationship, this does not exclude the existence of all the other feelings involved in their affair: passion, romance, frustration, etc. A love-hate dichotomy is used to describe the unlikely existence of mutually exclusive poles in one and the same thing, not to suggest that in this couple there is nothing but love and hate, one minute the former, one minute the latter. The novelty of such a relationship, were it to exist, would probably require a name of its own, given that a 'love hate' relationship implies something far less categorical and dramatic. Clausewitz's dual concept of war, or it might be better yet to refer to it in the plural, 'dual concepts of war', is not a quest to define all of war as belonging to two poles, but rather a quest to understand why these two mutually exclusive conceptual extremities seem to exist in reciprocation in every single war which exists in the space between them.

Further from the mark is the idea that a love-hate relationship automatically means that the hate part of the equation would be all the more hateful. This is the kind of reasoning that allows Van Creveld, like Liddell Hart before him, to argue that

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<sup>264</sup> Heuser. *Reading Clausewitz*, p. 34

because Clausewitz explored the real war/absolute war dichotomy, he was to blame for creating ‘brutally realistic doctrine’.<sup>265</sup> The reason he gets to this point is that he isolates both poles and fails to consider them as a pair. This is well demonstrated by the fact that when Van Creveld decides to take on the concept of ‘absolute war’ and attack it from all sides, he does so without considering it alongside or in parallel to ‘real war’, but only introduces ‘real war’ after the fact, once the rhetorical process of describing ‘absolute war’ as something altogether morally abhorrent is complete.

Van Creveld brings up the partially right point that the ‘absolute’ concept is borrowed from the German philosopher Immanuel Kant,<sup>266</sup> but in reality as we shall see below, it was in fact a student of Kant’s, Fichte, who coined the phrase. What is most Kantian about it is not the term itself, but the fact that it is counterbalanced with the ‘real’. In Van Creveld’s defence, however, it is possible to blame a part of this failure to appreciate the Kantian connection properly in *On War* on the grounds that he was citing the Howard/Paret translation of *On War*, which systematically omits or misinterprets the philosophical terminologies at the heart of Clausewitz’s project. Indeed, the Howard/Paret translation of Clausewitz, which Van Creveld uses as his source in *The Art of War*, makes a right proper mess of the ‘real’ part of the real/absolute dichotomy. For example, the word ‘wirklich’ a term Clausewitz used to distinguish that which is ‘real’ from what is ideal or abstract is at times omitted from the translation, thus ‘real war’ is translated as simply ‘war’, and otherwise, the translators are not consistent in their word choice, interchanging, for example the words ‘actual’ and ‘real’ from one occurrence of ‘wirklich’ to another.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Van Creveld. *The Art of War*, p. 117

<sup>266</sup> Van Creveld. *The Art of War*, pp. 114-118

<sup>267</sup> Compare for example Paret / Howard tr. on pages 90 & 119 with the word ‘real’ with page 580 where it is omitted; or Graham tr. on page 542 as ‘actual’, on pages 642 and 643 as ‘real’. Both



With regard to the question of whether or not Clausewitz was regularly in disagreement with himself, it becomes clear as we explore the true nature of his paradoxical observations that they were fundamental to his system of thought, planned, clear, and necessary to one another. The real problem however, does not come down to either the question of where and how this development happened, whether the real came before or after the absolute. And though failing to see the dichotomy as a thing in itself, a paradox that needs to be understood as such, has caused serious misinterpretations over the years, the far more interesting question to ask is rather: how fragile is this paradox? In trying to make war more intelligible, how close can it get to making itself unintelligible?

### Absolute War & Revolution

Johann Gottlieb Fichte is the one who first coined the term ‘absoluter Krieg’ (absolute war) and introduced it to Clausewitz. We know this because in 1809 Clausewitz read Fichte’s ‘On Machiavelli’ in which the term appears, and he actually took the time to write a letter of reply which he sent to the philosopher. Prior to this, Clausewitz had not made use of the term. In fact, it seems that amongst the texts that have been translated to English, Clausewitz did not actually introduce the concept of

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translations use ‘real war’ to render ‘eigentliche Krieg’ which would be clarified in this particular case by using the word ‘actual’ instead (p. 186 Graham; p. 222 Paret / Howard).

‘absolute war’ until many years later, while writing *On War*, a project not undertaken, according to Paret, until after 1815.<sup>268</sup>

Fichte used ‘absolute war’ to describe revolutionary conflict, or a war between the people and their prince. Specifically, he was describing his agreement with what he considered to be the ‘fundamental principle of Machiavellian politics’, which is that in order to be stable, whoever founds a republic or state and gives it laws must presuppose that all men are evil, and that given the occasion they will make use of this evilness for their own gain. Fichte is not commenting on whether that is a right or wrong presumption, but rather that it serves as a premise in order for the state to act as a constraining or coercive institution (*Zwangsanstalt*). The problem is as follows, however: if the people refuse to recognize the laws and the authority of the prince and rather choose to fight and reclaim their original independence and collective sovereignty; they are merely confirming from the perspective of the ruler what was presupposed to begin with... that they are evil. And this is what justifies the prince in his perceived right to defend himself from the villainy of others. Hence, revolutionary conflicts exist at the utmost threshold of the political relations between war and peace, because the prince wants peace, by which he implies that he wants to maintain his right to make laws and maintain his sovereignty, and the people in arms cannot be satisfied until both this sovereignty and lawmaking are fully annihilated. A half victory would be no victory at all. This is what makes war absolute, since the objectives are themselves absolute and fundamentally irreconcilable.<sup>269</sup> In Fichte’s version of it, ‘absolute War’ contains a political idea, it does not imply a judgement or analysis of the form the violence takes, or its strategic or tactical implications. It is nothing more than the *armed conflict* aspect of a political revolution.

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<sup>268</sup> Paret. *The Genesis of On War*, p. 3

<sup>269</sup> Fichte. *Machiavel, et autres écrits philosophiques et politiques de 1806-1807*, pp-56-57

Clausewitz borrowed this concept and enhanced it intellectually. It retains something deeply political to it, but brings forward much more depth with regard to the nature of pure political violence. When Clausewitz borrowed the concept from Fichte, his primary goal was visibly to clarify the role of violence unleashed in war, to isolate the idea in its most extreme form, so he could distinguish the political aspects which generate the central features of his theory, such as escalation, reciprocation, all out war, standstills, from the self-fulfilling nature of violence which also inherently produces these very same effects. So, while the violence of war is *naturally* or *inherently* escalatory, different policies can have the effect of restraining this tendency, or the opposite, releasing it and even enhancing it. Absolute war is a concept that is at the very threshold between the natural tendency of war and the political will to bring this tendency out to its extreme. And for Clausewitz, like Fichte, this has a revolutionary connotation.

Clausewitz himself recognized that the closest anyone had gotten to absolute war were the revolutionary French, under Napoleon. Even though he often described Napoleon as having an unlimited approach to war, Clausewitz nonetheless reiterated the fact that absolute war remained a conceptual thing, an abstraction, 'which has never in fact been achieved.'<sup>270</sup> A few paragraphs below, he adds that the campaigns of 1805, 1807 and 1809 make it 'easier for us to grasp the concept of modern, absolute war in all its devastating power.'<sup>271</sup> He is in fact walking the tight-rope of a paradox, where absolute war does not exist per se, but there are ways in which campaigns approach it, and to understand these events of history, we must first understand that war can have as its objective an absolute aim, which is to annihilate

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<sup>270</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Tr. Howard/Paret, Bk. VIII, Ch. 3, p. 582 (in this case, the Graham translation is too convoluted for our purposes)

<sup>271</sup> Idem.

the capacity for a political unit to resist, and then in fact completely overturn or annihilate the political structures themselves. Trying to find equilibrium between his theoretical concept of ‘absolute war’ and Napoleon’s constant approaching of it, Clausewitz juggles with his concept, eventually writing ‘candidly’ that:

[...] we shall have to grasp the idea that War, and the form which we give it, proceeds from ideas, feelings, and circumstances which dominate for the moment; indeed, if we would be perfectly candid we must admit that this has even been the case where it has taken its absolute character, that is, under Buonaparte.<sup>272</sup>

The tension is extreme in this paragraph, which might encourage some to argue that Clausewitz’s concept of ‘absolute war’ was not merely an idea, but something concrete that could in fact be enacted. But the actual words on the page maintain the fact that the concept belongs to the realm of ‘ideas, feelings, and circumstances’, which led Bonaparte to *apply war in an absolute character*, which is to say, make a policy to have this war take on this revolutionary and absolute form. However, this does not mean that Bonaparte succeeded in achieving *the* absolute, but rather that he pushed his forces in this direction in ways that had arguably never been seen in the history of mankind. ‘Candidly’ says Clausewitz, because he hates having to say it. It is troubling to him, because in the same paragraph, right above this quote, Clausewitz reminds the reader to avoid a ‘pure conception’ and to ‘[allow] room for everything foreign in nature which mixes up with it and fastens itself upon it – all the natural

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<sup>272</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 2, p. 644

inertia and friction of its parts, the whole of the inconsistency, the vagueness and hesitation (or timidity) of the human mind.<sup>273</sup> And so revolutionary war contains within it an absolute nature and propensity for extremes like no other war, but it remains subdued to limiting features nonetheless, even though it aspires to no limit other than political overthrow and annihilation.

Napoleon was in fact ‘exporting’ the revolution, bringing to life a political conception of war which had as its only limit, the non-limit implied by either completely destroying the political structures of the other. It was not merely that Napoleon was conquering Europe, but that in doing so he brought forth significant political reforms, proclaiming, for example, new laws, rights and constitutions for the peoples of Prussia, of Poland, and of the Rhineland. This, however, did not mean that war itself had become unlimited, or had achieved the full abstraction of the absolute. The full abstraction was the aim and the political nature or rather revolutionary aspect of the war. The physical conditions of battle remain unchanged. The limiting features of fog and friction, for example, still haunted the commander, and, as for the most part technologies and tactics had not particularly changed since the Seven Years’ War.

The politics had changed. And this could be felt in both the size of the engagements, because of the ‘levees en masse’ as well as the fervour and moral force of the revolutionary citizen-soldiers, or as Clausewitz explained:

War had suddenly become again an affair of the people, and that of a people numbering thirty millions, every one of whom regarded himself

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<sup>273</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 2, p. 644

as a citizen of the State [...]By this participation of the people in the war instead of a cabinet and an army, a whole nation with its natural weight came into the scale. Henceforward, the means available—the efforts which might be called forth—had no longer any definite limits; the energy with which the war itself might be conducted had no longer any counterpoise, and consequently the danger for the adversary had risen to the extreme.<sup>274</sup>

What made war absolute was not Napoleon himself, and surely not his tactics and strategies, but rather the politics of revolution, which led hundreds of thousands of invigorated citizen-soldiers with ambitions to do away with the Ancien Regime, at home and abroad.

Since the time of Buonaparte, war, through being first on one side, then again on the other, an affair of the whole nation, has assumed quite a new nature, or rather it has approached much nearer to its real nature, to its absolute perfection. The means then called forth had no visible limit, the limit losing itself in the energy and enthusiasm of the Government and its subjects.<sup>275</sup>

Clausewitz reaffirms that what leads war towards an absolute form is the political nature, is in effect the ‘revolutionary’ fervour, the will to transform the

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<sup>274</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 3-B, p. 658

<sup>275</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 3-B, pp. 658-659

ambitions of policy into the ambitions of warfare. Only absolute politics can lead to absolute war. And the only true absolute 'policy' is revolution. This realization will serve us in the later chapters when we discuss the role of freedom and emancipation in shaping the modern ethos of warfare.

That being said, what is important for the time being is to recognize that Clausewitz did not present absolute war as an apolitical concept and real war as the outcome of some external source of 'politics' that restrains absolute war. His analysis was far too complex to be satisfied with such simplicity. For Clausewitz, war contains this 'absolute' at the very centre of its concept, the reciprocation of violence leads to extreme, independently of politics, if let to its own devices. However, what is essential to add is that Clausewitz recognizes that this internal logic is understood by the state, when it applies reason to making use of war as a tool. It can restrain war, or at least try, though not always successfully, to restrain war, when objectives demand this, but in other cases, the policy may be to unleash war, enhance war, provide it with more force, more destructive technology, more soldiers, etc.

This is precisely what Clausewitz was trying to explain in the passage cited above, in which he is speaking of *Krieg ganz Krieg*. Now we can appreciate the second part of the statement:

This kind of idea would be indispensable even if war was perfect war [Krieg ganz Krieg], the perfectly unbridled element of hostility, for all the circumstances on which it rests, and which determine its leading features, viz., our own power, the enemy's power, allies on both sides, the characteristics of the people and their Governments respectively,

etc., as enumerated in the first chapter of the first book, are they not of a political nature, and are they not so intimately connected with the whole political intercourse that it is impossible to separate them.<sup>276</sup>

In the world of ideas, war is absolute. It is the pure reciprocation of extremes producing ever greater extremes. In real war, which spans between the standstill and the all-out war, whether the beast is restrained or unleashed is *equally the product of politics*. That is in fact their fundamental unity. To suggest that politics only apply to the restraint side of the equation is to miss Clausewitz's argument altogether. The failure to recognize this unity in the dialectic is precisely what leads certain interpreters to conceptualize Clausewitz as being dualistic, in contradiction with himself, and having changed his mind over time, rather than having deepened what he had started with, uncovering the paradox and building his concept of war upon it.

## Conclusion

To make the point that the absolute war / real war dichotomy is an objective ontological system in which to understand the nature of war, it is best to reach it by demonstrating the opposite: that it is *not subjective*. If Clausewitz had indeed suddenly changed his mind on the question, then it would have been subjective, but

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<sup>276</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk VIII, Ch. 6, p. 675



this we saw was not the case, the dichotomy emerged logically both as an internally coherent system and one that did not appear, but developed over time through deepening itself. Secondly, if the dichotomy was haphazardly posited and contained clear signs of Clausewitz caught in hopeless self-contradiction, then again, it would appear to be subjective, but in fact that the paradoxes which he exposes are not self-contradictory, but rather provide an external glance into the contradictions inherent in war eliminate this possibility as well. Hence, the two most likely sources of subjectivity having been excluded, Clausewitz's method appears to be rather objective: it allows the internal logic of violence and reciprocation on one end, and risk aversion on the other, to coexist as two forces of policy which generate war's sliding scale of manifestation.

That being said, however, Clausewitz offers some critical assessment to what he himself is writing, when he considers the problem with speaking of absolute and real war as separate concepts when in the context of revolution. He recognizes that revolution represents in some sense the breaking point or the logical limit of the real war / absolute war dichotomy, because it brings out the logic of the absolute in its manifestation of the real, because the policy of a revolution is itself absolute, a willingness to risk it all. The difference between the two separate concepts becomes terribly blurred in revolution. That is to say, the policy of revolution being absolute, the form of revolutionary war follows, as is the reverse case when policy has limited aims.

The discovery that both real war and absolute war were equally the products of policy gave Clausewitz a glimpse into war's political nature. But to complete this dialectical reconciliation of the real and the absolute, he could not simply state it as the continuation of policy by other means, simply because jumping from the former

part of this equation to the latter, actually makes very little sense, unless it is grounded in some logic or method. Why should war's dual concepts serve as a demonstration of its political nature? Could it not just as well show an infinite set of other properties or conclusion *On War*? The link had to be canalized and connected, and only then could Clausewitz home in on the single conclusion, and then go ahead defining the political element further. Had he been only influenced by Kant, Clausewitz would not have been able to tie the impasse between real war and absolute war directly to the political. He would have been forced to generate the real and the absolute alone as objective observations, a static impasse in itself, to which he could supplement a fully subjective and external corollary regarding war's political element. However, this was not satisfactory. Clausewitz wanted to show objectively as well that the war was the continuation of policy by other means, and to do this, he had to show that it was a dynamic solution to the impasse he had uncovered. For this, however, he would need to find a metaphysical solution to Kant, a way to overcome that which philosophy of 'Verstand' *could not unravel*.

## Conclusion to Part I

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In Part I, we set off to demonstrate that Clausewitz's method converged with Kant's philosophy and that this shaped the first two moments in his dialectical war theory, the refutation of the positive doctrines, and the development of war's dual-nature as 'real' and 'absolute'. The result of this convergence of method is shown to have had parallel impacts in war theory as the method had had in the metaphysics. Instead of seeking out truth regarding war in forms that were immutable, natural and external to the thing, best exemplified by the quest for 'principles of war', Clausewitz pursued an opposite direction: where the object of study is the thing in itself, and the prescriptions are not fixed, eternal, and perfect, like God, but in flux, mortal, and imperfect, like man. On the one hand, fundamental principles and positive doctrines fail because war is so human; it is an element of 'social life',<sup>277</sup> the fact that it is in constant mutual reciprocation between human actors makes it a game [*Spiel*]<sup>278</sup> in which players act and react, and this is what undermines the absoluteness of doctrine. On the other hand, Clausewitz's ontological exploration of war's dual concepts again breaks war away from naturalistic and mystical explanations for war, because it shows that the forms war takes are not predestined externally, but the product of

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<sup>277</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. II, Ch. 3, p. 92

<sup>278</sup> Clausewitz makes numerous references to this, including where he compares war to a card game in Book I, Ch. 1 and a game of chess in Book VII, Ch. 13.

human, political agency at the very centre of war's inner essence. In either case, the need for systematizing causality from some divine origin is eliminated; there is no need for a *causa prima*, because even if we exclude it from the analysis, the theory of war remains intact logically, even in a universe where there is no God and where causality itself offers no certainty, war can function within an internal logic that straddles between game theory and politics.

The two moments, methodological and ontological, are distinct in that the first is an analytical, negative task, and the second is a synthetic, positive one. In both cases, however, Clausewitz transposed the Kantian lessons regarding the Enlightenment metaphysical debates into the field of war theory. A pragmatist, no doubt, he most certainly did not do this for the sake of high scholasticism, but simply because it did the job so well. He had perceived the fact that there were similarities in the weaknesses he saw in the scientific theories of war and the solutions Kant had provided in his theories on human understanding and aesthetics. The process of positing and refuting the scientific demonstration of the divine generated an intellectual history that was incredibly informative to the study of war. And Clausewitz happened to be at the right place, at the right time, to be the first to make this transposition.

Clausewitz did not merely refute one positive doctrine or another, but the very principle of codifying principles of war to begin with. Clausewitz's scepticism uncovered the weaknesses that existed not only in the claims made regarding the observation and identification of causal relationships, but also the question of whether this causality, even if it were properly discovered, could serve as the edifice of certainty, which clearly, according to Clausewitz, it could not. Therefore, he replaced these doctrines with a far less ambitious idea of what war theory should and could

afford generals and heads of state. His was a limited theory, built not on mere scepticism, but on a sceptical method which made use of dialectics to uncover both the antinomial nature of opposing positive doctrines and the 'Kritik' to extract a moderate or relative scope of knowledge from experience and history. As a result of this, faith in positive doctrines began to waiver. Jomini had to rewrite his entire opus just to keep afloat. And the more people explored new ways of generating positive doctrines, the more pronounced became their descent into circular logic, until the very glue that was keeping it altogether, the concept of 'genius' was in effect replaced by its opposite: 'common sense'. As of the moment Clausewitz exposed the problems of positive doctrines, clarified the role the Kritik, and then developed his limited theory of war, the field was forever changed. From that point on, all theories would be forced to measure up to the same standards of proof. And since principles could not be proven any more than their metaphysical counterpart in philosophy, these principles ballooned up into vagaries that were condemned to either pop or deflate whenever one made use of them in concrete ways.

Meanwhile importing Kantian metaphysics into war theory had positive ontological implications as well. By conceiving war *in twos* as a reciprocation between opposite tendencies, towards extremes and towards standstills, Clausewitz was able to posit a theory of war, which unlike his stance on positive doctrines, as not a 'limited theory' but the opposite: an absolute theory of war, built on a paradox, which establishes two mutually exclusive concepts of war: the 'real' and the 'absolute' in reciprocation. That is to say, that to the single question 'what is war?', Clausewitz provided a plural answer. It was this dual answer that would generate the political element in war, but to understand fully how this was achieved, and by what method, the previous chapter can only serve as a mild introduction. The connection to

Fichte and Kant provides only part of the answer. To understand how it was possible for Clausewitz to jump from the ontological realm to the ethical realm, that is, from positing the opposition between absolute war and real war to extracting from this the conclusion, 'war is the continuation of policy by other means' we must enter into a discussion of how Hegel and Clausewitz converged on method, and what this meant for both their dialectical theories of war. At this point, we enter the third dialectical moment of war theory, where the political and ethical aspects of war are uncovered.

## INTERLUDE – From Kant to Hegel: The Dialectical Levels in Clausewitz's On War

In Part I, we explored the origin and scope of Kant's role in shaping the dialectics that Clausewitz made use of in his war theory. What started as an argumentative technique regarding methods in war (tactics and strategy) grew into an ontological framework based on war's dual concepts as real and absolute. The next phase of this exploration, in Part II, leads into the question of ethics. However, before taking on such a distinct task, it would be useful to ask first, how do these three layers of analysis link up? The goal of this short mid-section will be to make a preliminary suggestion with regard to the transitions from the first two dialectical moments to the third: these three levels of analysis are fully integrated, and mutually necessary to one another. The development of Clausewitz's dialectics in *On War* is not only a matter of him learning, testing, and developing the method over time and further integrating it into his book, it was also in some ways a calculated plan to guide the reader into a deeper and deeper understanding of the dialectical method and its conclusions. *On War* moves the reader through these three *moments* in a logical order, from the simple to the complex, which is akin to how Hegel generally developed his thoughts, best exemplified in the *Phenomenology* but also elsewhere. What is more, he also accomplishes as Hegel does, a process whereby each subsequent moment is of a higher order, where that which precedes it is encompassed into the logic of that which follows, and that which follows grows out of the logic of what preceded it

The first layer dealt with the single and isolated problem of violence, or the use of force towards defeating one's enemy. The interrogation was happening at a methodological level, or at the level of the question 'How to?'. Analytical, rather than synthetic, Clausewitz's refutation of the positive doctrines had a universal character,



it was formulated against all principles of war, but its solution to this infinity of principles regarding the single issue of force's method, was non-numerical, it was void and null, leading to an impasse, a non-admissibility regarding the logic that was supposed to bind the principles in the first place. However, in order demonstrate this problem of logic, Clausewitz needed to rely on a system of dialectics that could showcase the antinomies of reason and prove that indeed the principles, though they claimed to be synthetical, could make no claim to this 'type' of human understanding. Since context could always invalidate an absolute theory of strategy or tactics, only a limited theory was tenable.

Having introducing dialectics at this first level, a second level of theory automatically emerged regard the structural question 'what is war?' because the conclusion of the first level was in fact that context determined strategy and tactics. So then, what was this context? What unchanging nature of war was providing a frame to all the elements in war that were in fact forever changing? Clausewitz went from a negative theory, a refutation of positive doctrines, to a positive, speculative theory about the nature of war as having an absolute dimension and a real dimension. Somewhere in a bipolar realm that is defined by standstills at one end, and all out war at the other, politics would determine the equilibrium point. Here, Clausewitz was not proposing a limited theory at all, but quite the opposite: an absolute theory based on there being two poles which by definition include all wars spanning from that which can be imagined to that which can be carried out. And out of this emerges his conclusion that war is political, which is to say, it is the product of a state's 'intelligence', or the activity of political deliberation and the consequent application of policy by the executive powers of the state. If the first level of dialectics represented the question 'how' and the second 'what' we find that the 'how' results in

the necessity of context for its validation, and the question ‘what’ emerges from asking what defines this context.

Eventually though, Clausewitz arrives at a *third moment*, or plane of analysis, because the question ‘what’ begs a set of questions of its own. If war is a political thing, then why does it take the forms it takes, and what is the nature of the relationship that binds war to politics? The very attempt to provide an answer to these elevates the discussion away from the ontological to the ethical, which in effect confirms and validates the ontology by submitting it the ethical. That is to say that politics *take possession* of war, becomes responsible for its objectives, and the form it materializes into. As a result of this subjugation, the political becomes the agency, the focal point of war’s ethics, and can therefore be blamed if its actions are deemed unjustified and evil, or honored if they are deemed just and good.

As of the moment Clausewitz began applying dialectics to his refutation, he became ensnared into a system of logic that eventually fulfills itself in the process of being applied. Clausewitz could not expect to break down the arguments of the Enlightenment including their methods using Kant’s tools (i.e. critique, categories of human understanding, antinomies) without arriving, as Kant did, to a distinction between the real and the ideal, since the method only succeeds in its refutation as a process of constructing this dichotomy between the material and the ideal. And in the end, the only way to make the chasm intelligible and rational was to uncover what was creating it in the first place, the hierarchical relationship between politics and war, which is in itself, the first step in proclaiming a modern and secular ethical proposition.

Clausewitz's dialectical reasoning contains a dynamic element to it, where each moment appears to be the continuation of what began in the previous moment. It is a boulder that accelerates once it has been nudged off the hill. Yet this movement in the dialectic has something distinctly non-Kantian to it, because Kant's philosophy was static. And it is here that we must begin consider what then is being observed here. In Part II, we shall go through the entire process of uncovering the Hegelian influence in Clausewitz, but for now, let us present a preliminary clue regarding the impasse and distinction between Part I and Part II, the particle of disagreement and modification that allows us to jump from Kant to Hegel in our exploration of Clausewitz.

In Book VIII, Clausewitz presented both the absolute and the real concepts of war, and eventually, these led to chapter 6-B, entitled 'War as an Instrument of Policy' where he offered to 'look for that unity into which, in practical life [im praktischen Leben], these antagonistic elements combine themselves by partly neutralizing each other.'<sup>279</sup> Each word in the first paragraph of Chapter 6-B must be taken at its full worth, because they were chosen and arranged in way that shows a deep understanding of Kant, which, if ignored, leaves an incomplete impression. Let us therefore consider the whole paragraph, while paying special attention to certain words for which I have provided the German original, as well as the Howard/Paret where the two translations differ:

HAVING made the requisite examination on both sides of that state of  
antagonism [Zwiespalt] in which the nature of war stands with relation

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<sup>279</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 2-B, p. 674

to other interests of men individually and of the bond of society, in order not to neglect any of the opposing elements,—an antagonism (H/P tr. ‘incompatibility’) [Zwiespalt] which is founded in our own nature, and which, therefore, no philosophy (H/P trans. ‘philosophy’) [philosophische Verstand] can unravel,—we shall now look for that unity into which, in practical life (H/P trans. ‘real life’) [praktischen Leben], these antagonistic elements combine themselves by partly neutralising each other. We should have brought forward this unity at the very commencement, if it had not been necessary to bring out this contradiction very plainly, and also to look at the different elements separately. Now, this unity is the conception that war is only a part of political intercourse, therefore by no means an independent thing in itself.<sup>280</sup>

Some depth to the passage is missing in either translation with regard to the omission of the word ‘Verstand’, which was mentioned earlier, but with regard to the second translation issue, Howard/Paret’s use of the word ‘real’ as opposed to ‘practical’ rob the reader of an important aspect of the text. With regard to the second element, practical life is not interchangeable with ‘real life’ or simply ‘life’ itself, because in German philosophy ‘practicality’ is a reference to moral philosophy, as is the case in the subject matter of the *Critique of Practical Reason* which is essentially an essay on morality and ethics. Practicality is how one renders philosophy into everyday use, that is to demonstrate how it applies to decision-making on ethical questions or *how* one is to *act* in the world:

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<sup>280</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 6-B, p. 674

Practical reason is the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do. Deliberation of this kind is practical in at least two senses. First, it is practical in its subject matter, insofar as it is concerned with action. But it is also practical in its consequences or its issue, insofar as reflection about action itself directly moves people to act.<sup>281</sup>

The fact that the ontological concepts of ‘absolute’ and ‘real’ war are coming together in a concept that applies to ethics and morality, as opposed to a further ontological exploration marks an important transition. We are exiting one level of analysis in order to construct a higher one atop it. This dialectical upward construction, we will see in the upcoming section is distinctly a Hegelian use of dialectics. If we recall, Kant stopped short of reconciliation and understood paradoxes as sterile and fixed, rather than fertile and dynamic.

To appreciate this, we must return to the term to our previous discussion of Kant’s two-way splits, [Zwiespalt]. Clausewitz is not making the argument that ‘philosophy’ cannot resolve the dichotomy he has uncovered in the absolute and real forms of war, but actually arguing specifically with regard to *a branch* of philosophy, philosophy of reason, which in Kant’s work came to a halt, unable to resolve the antagonisms [Zwiespalt] that emerge from the antinomies of pure reason.<sup>282</sup> The difficulty, for English readers is that the word ‘reason’ can be translated to either

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<sup>281</sup> Wallace, R. Jay, ‘Practical Reason’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/practical-reason>.

<sup>282</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft, First Edition*, ebook locations 6342 & 3978

‘Vernunft’ or ‘Verstand’, which have distinct connotations. Hannah Arendt explains that for Kant, the latter is closer to the concept of ‘intellect’. ‘Vernunft’ is associated to the meaning of things whereas ‘Verstand’ is associated to knowledge of things.<sup>283</sup> Another way to consider the difference is to see ‘Verstand’ as the type of knowing which is spontaneous in the mind and can exist outside of sensorial certainty,<sup>284</sup> but which is not in and of itself intuitive, like sense-certainty. ‘Vernunft’ on the other hand, represents the intuitive, the type of reason that ‘makes sense’ or appears to be intuitive, through experience for example. Vernunft is therefore the reasoning which attempts, in the case of conditioned knowing, to encompass the ‘totality of conditions, which is to say, unconditionality.’<sup>285</sup> And so, Clausewitz recognizes the impasse, the pure antinomy, as belonging to the area of philosophy of reason where this impasse occurs, but he is also, in this paragraph setting himself up to discuss the higher meaning of this impasse, and its reconciliation. But this reconciliation does not undo, it cannot undo, the contradiction; it merely makes sense of it, or give it *meaning*.

Hegel’s problem with Kant was precisely in this vein, that his philosophy had in fact churned Vernunft into a Verstand, a discourse on meaning and pure reason that does not elevate itself beyond intellectualizing it, splicing it, categorizing it. In his own view, Vernunft’s very function is to suppress and consume the oppositions in Verstand.<sup>286</sup> Keeping this in mind, it becomes clear that the paragraph introduces something new and ‘post-Kantian’ in Clausewitz’s thinking. Using the terms in a very precise way, he is bringing forward the possibility that within the paradox dividing the

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<sup>283</sup> Hannah Arendt. *La vie de l’esprit*, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992), p. 29

<sup>284</sup> Vaysse, *Le vocabulaire de Kant*, p. 36

<sup>285</sup> Vaysse, *Le vocabulaire de Kant*, p. 85

<sup>286</sup> Benoit Garceau. ‘Les travaux de jeunesse de Hegel’, *Philosophiques*, vol. 1, n° 1, 1974, p 31-32

real from the absolute, there exists a possible ‘unity’ or consumption of the opposition upon which emerges a new, higher concept [*Begriff*]. Was he in fact flirting with Hegelianism? Before we can substantiate this claim, it is essential that we start by exploring Hegel’s philosophy and method, and this is where Part II is about to take us away from strategic and tactical questions, away from ontological question, and into the sphere of practical life, ethics.

## PART II – The Unresolved Ethical Impasse in Dialectical War Theory



## Introduction to Part II

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By understanding the dialectical system of thought as meaning not only a process of thinking in ‘twos’, but also of thinking in terms of how larger paradoxes can emerge from attempting to resolve smaller paradoxes, we begin grasp the method as a continuum in time. As a result, if we wish to give ourselves a full view of the paradox that splits apart the political ethics of Clausewitz and Hegel, it is not enough to consider it isolation. We should frame it, sandwich it, between the paradoxes from their convergence on the ‘political ethos’ emerged, and the conceptual reconciliation and new paradoxes which their divergence on ‘instrumentality’ and ‘right’ produce.

It is not within the scope of this essay to uncover whether or not there is a logical resolution to this impasse, though it seems reasonable that there should indeed be one, if one is given the opportunity to seek it out. A study of the reconciliation and new paradoxes would probably result in a thesis as large or even larger than this one into this paradox itself. That being said, the previous paradox, the one which Hegel and Clausewitz effectively unravel and surpass is well within our means, and can be addressed quickly in this introduction in order to provide context to the upcoming chapters.

The commonality between Hegel and Clausewitz's ethical systems is that they introduced a secular, political ethos to our concept of war, which replaced the ethical context in which framed warfare prior to modern times: a naturalist, theistic ethos, where war could be understood as a fact of nature, the wrath of God, or the fulfilment of scripture, where war could be legitimized insofar as it pleased the Gods. The modern secular ethos developed by Hegel and Clausewitz was not immaculately conceived, but can be understood as the logical unravelling and effective replacement of the paradox which was inherent to the previous theistic ethos of war. To fully appreciate the significance of the new ethical system, it is necessary that we should go back briefly in time, consider what preceded it, in order to perceive its birthplace and the momentum of contradiction in history which brought forward its necessary and logical fruition.

That war is a 'political' thing may appear to be simple and not very contentious a proposition to our modern ears. And indeed some 20<sup>th</sup> century authors have played around shaping arguments along the line of 'so what?' with regard to Clausewitz's famed formula, 'war is the continuation of policy by other means'. While many have indeed raised this problem, Foucault probably phrased it best in his critical analysis regarding whether one should ever separate politics from war, asking: 'Should we turn the expression around, then, and say that politics is war pursued by other means?'<sup>287</sup>

While there is good reason to agree with the counter-strategic tradition in war theory in which war and politics are understood as a historical and 'mutually generative relationship,'<sup>288</sup> Foucault's counter-formula is not problem free, in that, in

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<sup>287</sup> Foucault, Michel. *History of Sexuality*, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p. 93

<sup>288</sup> Reid, Julian. 'Re-appropriating Clausewitz: The Neglected Dimensions of Counter-Strategic Thought', *Classical Theory in International Relations*, No. 103, Cambridge, (2004), p. 277

trying to play on the reciprocity or interdependency that shapes war and politics, it doesn't consider that while policy may depend on force and force on policy, war itself, as Clausewitz argues, does not and cannot exist *independently* of policy.<sup>289</sup> Foucault's observation suggests that war can come first, and policy second, but this could very well be an indemonstrable proposition. The inverse, however, can be shown to be true in most instances, even those where one would least expect it. Even in a timarchy, where the whole apparatus of society is based on military governance, and where one might expect that war is most likely to emerge immaculately conceived as a cultural or social phenomenon that exists independently of policy, this is not the case. War remains a decision, and therefore an act of policy. Plans are drawn up. Directives are given from the generals to the foot soldiers. There might be a propensity, an ease in choosing to engage in war in such society, but there is no war until a decision has been taken to make war, regardless of how this decision-making process takes form. If that is the case in even the most purified form of war-related government, then it must necessarily be even truer of all non-military governments. Foucault's inversion of the formula, though it is an aesthetically pleasing approach to refutation, ultimately has very little scientific weight: even if one had irrefutable data that demonstrated a credible set of wars that were conceived independently of policy and thereafter shaping policy, the argument would nonetheless remain rather meaningless, because, as Raymond Aron pithily explains:

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<sup>289</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 2-B, p. 674

These formulas are, formally, equivalent. They both express the continuity of competition and the use of alternately violent and non-violent means towards ends which do not differ in essence.<sup>290</sup>

Once war is conceived as inherently tied to the political in one way or the other, it is freed from all other conceptions, of which the most historically important would be the idea of war as an act of God or the fulfilment of scripture. Understanding war as policy is part and parcel with the secularization of warfare and its demystification. From this perspective, for example, we can even look at holy wars from an external standpoint and perceive them as having nothing holy to them at all, but merely policy orientations that happen to be dictated by clerical authorities. It is a significant breakthrough, first, because once observed objectively as policy, war's nature can never 'un-secularize' itself as the above example shows, and second, because the ethical consequences of excluding the divine are extreme: it implies that responsibility in war is located at the human level, and here, the 'greater good' is constructed as an intelligible object, rather than understood as the subjective whims of deities.

The difficulty with studying the ethics of modern secular war is that the notion of what is good and what is evil is not so clearly demarked as what we would find in religious ethics, which will be not only categorical, but also explicitly stated in scripture. That being said, breaking war away from mythology does not necessarily lead to more benign or more malign forms of warfare, but it does pose a major conundrum with regard to the locus of justification for warfare. If, on the one hand, the secular frame allows a more logical understanding of the motivations in war and

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<sup>290</sup> Raymond Aron. *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (London: Transaction, 2003), p. 162

generates the bases for a sociology of war, rooted in the human condition and its social organization, thereby lending itself to a more systematic and scientific study, the difficulty that haunts it is whether or not there is such a thing as a *secular conscience*, a voice within the human world, as opposed to the divine world, which can serve as the ethical focal point where decisions regarding greater goods and lesser evils take form.

Defining war as a purely political thing, thereby excluding the divine, is precisely where the dialectics of Hegel and Clausewitz converged. Clausewitz's perspective on this was presented in the last chapter of Part I, and now, in the first chapter of Part II, we shall go over the way in which Hegel understood this political nature. The convergence, however, reaches an impasse when both authors draw conclusions with regard to the ethical form this demystification should take. While they both agree on the questions 'who?' and 'what?', when it comes to war's relation to politics, they disagree on the questions 'how?' and 'why?' – that is to say, war is political, and it belongs to the state or the political will, but the ethical implications are distinct because they disagree on how the state takes ownership or is in possession of it.

Hegel will find the ethical element of war residing in the thing itself, a self-justifying right of the state or institutionalized political will, whereas Clausewitz makes a neutral conclusion, where war is an instrument of the state, and therefore deprived of any self-contained ethical rationale. Thus, while the political element is raised to the centre, the ethical element remains unresolved, because even within this common political frame, the locus of responsibility for 'good' and 'evil' in war can be distinct.

Addressing this subject of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in war is a delicate task in that, regardless of the angle one takes, there is an almost oxymoronic element to the term ‘war ethics’ that leads to the criticism that those who make the attempt are merely trying to cover war’s dirty, ugly face with a glossy mask. How can anyone distinguish good and evil in the context of war, if all sides claim to be fighting for the greater good, and all sides are committing evil acts? Studying ethics in war cannot undo this greater problem altogether, but it can contribute to improving our discernment and our understanding. And there are lasting and measurable effects to this, such as laws of war, the creation of an international criminal court to punish crimes against humanity, heightened care for avoiding attacks on civilians, and most importantly, as Part II will explore, a narrowing the set of reasons for going to war in the first place, until there is only one final, logically inescapable reason, as opposed to a the wide array of reasons that could be claimed in previous eras of human history: conquest for its own sake, monarchical successions, manifest destiny, evangelization, colonization, capturing slaves, etc.

To codify war ethics, it is useful to frame one’s mind to renege the false impression that it is possible to categorize all of evil on one side of the conflict and all of good on the other. Rather, the problem of war ethics resides in the fact that the categories are usually intertwined and relative: war may be conceived as a particular evil within the framework of the greater good, in which there can be particular good actions in the context of war’s greater evil. The latter of the two is generally referred to as *jus in bello*, justice in war, an approach to finding ‘good’ practices in war, including, for example, prohibitions on certain types of weapons (e.g. landmines, mustard gas, etc.), the discrimination between civilian and military targets, proportionality in the application of force, etc. This subset however, is not the

principle subject of our discussions in Part II, though some themes might indirectly cross over from time to time. The subject at hand is rather the former of the two, generally referred as *jus ad bellum*, the reasons for going to war in the first place. Within this category, there are both highly tangible reasons for war, or a *just cause* for war, such as fighting back an invasion or punishing a grave wrong, but there has always been some *wiggle room* for much less tangible justifications for engaging in warfare, albeit justifications that can be far more powerful and less restricted in their scope and breadth compared to the tangible forms of just cause.

It is typical in the field to speak of such wars using the term crusade, be it religious, liberal, revolutionary, etc. However this term is as overused as it is imprecise, since it assumes the intangible reasons for war lead to intangible or unlimited aims in warfare. A war justified by scripture or by Gods may have ambitions that are in fact quite limited, and unmotivated by grand schemes for converting new adepts or reclaiming all lands holy. Rebels fighting to topple a prince or a tyrant may be grounded in some ideology without necessarily having any intention to embark on a campaign to ‘spread’ the revolution. And so, the question at hand is not so much where and how far an idea can take war, but rather which ideas have this power to justify war in intangible ways, why and how they generate such a powerful sense of greater good, that they can justify not any singular evil, but forms of an evil that shift and evolve over time, for reasons of policy, strategy, and tactics, but essentially and ultimately as a result of technological development and how this impacts all three.

Even in a secular notion of war ethics, the concepts ‘good’ and ‘evil’ imply metaphysical properties since the pair is absolutely imbued with theistic vestiges, their connotation and etymology being spiritual to begin with. As Nietzsche explores in the

Genealogy of Morals, ‘goodness’, even as a collective concept, is by no means an objective and immutable thing, but one that has varied dramatically in time and space according to the subjective values of different peoples. In fact, Nietzsche argues that completely opposite notions of goodness and badness can exist concurrently, depending on context or experiences of social life, as is the case with populations in positions of slavery or mastery.<sup>291</sup>

The real homestead of the concept “good” is sought and located in the wrong place: the judgment “good” did not originate among those to whom goodness was shown. Much rather has it been the good themselves, that is, the aristocratic, the powerful, the high-lioned, the high-minded who have felt that they themselves were good.<sup>292</sup>

The English word ‘good’ itself is derived from ‘god’, a fact equally true of the the Latin languages, where ‘bene’ (‘bien’ in French, ‘bueno’ in Spanish, etc.) is derived from the Indo-European roots for the *word of God*, which is interchangeable with the biblical idea of God being *the Word*. Given this, it is best to understand goodness as it pertains to being godlike or at the very least, in concordance with godliness. With regard to our subject, it should be assumed then that if the gods to which peoples pray change over time, then one should expect a serious shift with regard to the reasoning behind war-fighting, or more precisely, how it is justified in ways that are coherent with scripture and far from heresy.

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<sup>291</sup> Nietzsche. *The Genealogy of Morals*, tr. H.B. Samuel (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1887) Modern Library ebook locations 371 & 1266

<sup>292</sup> Nietzsche. *The Genealogy of Morals*, ebook location 197



Without wanting to go too far into what form a theistic concept of good and evil takes when it is applied to war, it is worth taking a quick look, which will clarify the distinction of modern ethics to pre-modern ethics. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, justifying war as ‘godlike’ would have been a very simple thing, for the gods were vengeful, vain, and cruel. There had been war among the gods and the Titans. There were fierce episodes of violence and viciousness. Uranus ate his own children. Zeus sliced him open to free himself and his brothers Poseidon and Hades. In this world of gods, savage, eternal punishments abound and were imposed by powerful gods onto lower gods, or by any god onto humans. Prometheus, a god, is tied to a boulder and suffers the pain of having his heart eaten out by an eagle daily, only to regenerate by night. Sisyphus, a man, suffers another such eternal fate, to carry a boulder uphill only to let it roll down in order to carry it uphill again and again forever. To act ‘godlike’ in this context is to act as the master acts towards the slave, with no recognition of any right, not life, not dignity, nothing. In this context, war’s ‘justification’ could be passed off as a misnomer altogether. Why would it need justification at all, if the universe is understood as an essentially brutal place, governed naturally by force and cruelty? Man was not responsible for war, because war was a fact of nature, and to fight was merely to survive, to live. In this context, Thucydides’ famous maxim takes its fullest meaning: ‘The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must’.<sup>293</sup>

In complete opposition to this, in the Christian tradition, derived from the Judaic experience of exodus and slavery, the difficulty in reconciling Jesus’ pacifism and meekness with warfare was a more difficult task, but which could nonetheless be overcome. If a legitimate authority amongst Christians could identify a just cause,

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<sup>293</sup> Robert B. Strassler, ed. *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War* (New York: Free Press 1996), #5.89

then war could be just in the eyes of God insofar as his meek warriors intended the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil, which essentially means working towards advancing God's justice in the world.<sup>294</sup> This was the needed rhetoric which could smooth out the coexistence between the teachings of Christ and the realpolitik of sustaining his Church. It was achieved by separating the idea of good and evil as it relates to the personal and as it relates to the universal and spiritual, making it thereby possible to be a warring Christian, meek and pacific in the heart, while also projecting a violence thoroughly external to the self, the will of God fought for the glory of God, as opposed to an individual act for gain and glory. *Non nobis Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam* was the motto of the Knights Templar: 'Not to us, Lord, but to Your Name give the glory.'<sup>295</sup> If the Greco-Roman 'goodness' could be found directly in imitation of the cruel gods, and the responsibility of the state of nature, the Christians needed to remove themselves from the act, thereby *incarnating the divine* (a concept that is central to Christian faith) through meekness and self-sacrifice, in imitation of the form of goodness expressed in the teachings and the life and death of their Son of God.

Religious coherence was achieved with regard to war in both cases, though for very distinct reasons. The common element however, was that both forms of religious justification implied the non-accountability or non-responsibility of the human element in the inhumanity of war. The actions of war were pre-ordained in mysticism, because war had yet been conceived as a social construction, but assumed to belong to the natural order of things or to the fulfilment of god's will. The externalization of responsibility in the dehumanization found in warfare is analogous and therefore the logical outcome of religions based on the slave/master duality, since the basis for

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<sup>294</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, Second and Revised Edition, Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1920. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3040.htm>

<sup>295</sup> Psalm 115, v1 Hebrew Psalter Psalm 113, v13 Greek Psalter

godliness in both cases is the outcome of this dehumanizing pair. The spiritual element is conceived as either cruel and warlike and causing war, or meek and redeeming and repairing the harms of war.

If Nietzsche judged it better to assume a master morality than a slave morality; what he missed in the process was the possibility that the master/slave relationship had in fact been transcended, done with conceptually, by the ideals of the bourgeois revolutions. The modern political realm was no longer dependent on either of the two moral systems which Nietzsche placed in opposition, but could be grounded in new precepts, where mutual recognition of rights and equality in the brotherhood of man would exclude the role of gods as either the justification for a brutal state of nature, or alternatively, a redeemer or payer of debts. The synthesis of a new war ethic from the vestiges of two previous ethical opposites was only possible because the new social relations of man excluded the dehumanization of mastery and slavery. Mutual recognition of rights raised the human element upwards, and rendered the divine unnecessary to social relations, not only within borders, but also beyond borders.

It was the French who best constructed or verbalized the ethical doctrine of the modern republic in their *dévis*e: 'Liberté. Égalité. Fraternité.' The triad is not a mere slogan, but a system of internal necessity. There can be no liberty and equality without mutual recognition, which is fraternity. There can be no liberty unless all men are equal and recognized as such. And there can be no equality unless all men are free and recognized as such. The emergence of this triadic concept was the ultimate demise of the master/slave relationship and its derivatives in serfdom, monarchy, etc. because it eliminated the very essence of these relationships. Thus, liberty, equality, and fraternity were at the very heart of a secularization process in politics, in that their logic was self-contained, self-ordained, and independent of an external or

metaphysical force to qualify or define ‘good’ and ‘evil’. Together, the three represented a new worldly concept of ‘goodness’ which occurred without any imitation of the divine.

The process of arriving at a political rather than theistic ethical framework for war is no doubt a long historical process, the development of ideas about community, the divine, and the intersection of these two. And while we can notice in the bourgeois revolutions a beginning of this transition, it was not written into war theory in an exhaustive and systematic way until Hegel and Clausewitz stepped to the plate. As part two explores how this was achieved, and what methodologies made the process intelligible, one question that it must lead us to is whether or not the positing of a political ethos for war actually impacts the shape and form of war. If there is indeed a ‘secular conscience’, which resides outside of the divine world, what form shall it give to war, this exercise at the very cusp of good and evil, where lesser evils are meant to be tolerated for greater goods, and where we often attempt to add textures and contours of good actions onto a canvas of a greater evil.

At the intersection between Clausewitz and Hegel, we find that two contrary ideal notions of this secular ethic take form, that of ‘right’ and ‘instrumentality’, and in order to gauge what they mean in real life, as the inform and determine this ‘secular conscience’. In order to demonstrate its reality, the final chapter in Part II proposes an applied study where these two perspectives were applied by directly referring to either Clausewitz or Hegel, but not to both. During the anti-bourgeois revolutions, while the communists ‘connected’ to Clausewitz, the anarchists shunned him altogether and connected instead with Hegel. This story completes the picture. It gives life to the dichotomous ethics, and demonstrates their real and concrete manifestations in opposition.



## Chapter 1 – Framing War as a Right: Hegel and the Ethics of Actualized Freedom

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The dialectics of war experienced a dual evolution right from its inception, for while Clausewitz was adapting Kantian methodologies to war theory directly, Hegel was exploring the consequences of Kant's ideas philosophically, trying to move beyond the metaphysical impasse between the real and the ideal, which had been bequeathed by Kant. As a result, the dialectics of war were split methodologically from their very onset: Clausewitz developing an isolated dialectical theory of war, and Hegel developing a dialectical universe which would eventually encapsulate the question of war as well, not so much as a distinct study, but rather as a sub-section in his chapter on the state. This gap would eventually converge as Clausewitz began experimenting with Hegelian dialectics and increasingly integrated them into his works. That being said, before we can start exploring this convergence, we must first ask what Hegelian dialectics actually are, and how they were applied to war by Hegel himself.

This first chapter of Part II is devoted exclusively to the study of Hegel method and his use of it in understanding of the ethical underpinnings of state and war. To do this is no easy task, in that it is impossible to appreciate the depth of

Hegel's ideas on war and state simply by extracting certain ideas and quotes; one must analyze his conclusions in the context of his system as a whole, or else they either come off as wry or altogether unintelligible. Therefore, we shall go through the steps of framing Hegel's philosophy as a reply to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and thereafter exploring his method in its simplest form, followed by its more complex application to the realm of politics and society. This step by step process will clarify Hegel and provide the whole picture, which allows us to appreciate his most controversial conclusion in a more balanced way. Indeed, the oft-cited and generally loathed passage, "*War is the moral health of peoples in their struggle against petrification,*"<sup>296</sup> will be shown to have a legitimate underlying logic, because the state is in-itself an ethical system meant to generate, develop and protect individual freedom. The strength or decay of the nation is for Hegel deeply linked to the notion of freedom, because freedom represents both the central *raison d'être* of the state or the modern republic as well as its *modus operandi*. Freedom is presented as a self-fulfilling loop that vitalizes both the state and its citizens. And, insofar as war is fought for this freedom, it is by Hegelian standards justified in-itself as a 'right' of the state.

### Hegelian Dialectics: An Overview

The *Philosophy of Right* is among Hegel's last works. And it seems fitting that it should be, since Hegel's method is a complex one, which he took many years to develop, before trying to engage it in such a difficult and wide topic as human affairs. For this same reason, we shall also start by presenting the origin and more simple

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<sup>296</sup> Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. Baillie, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. p. 432.

applications of the method, so that we may quickly get a modest but practical grasp of how it works, and thereupon begin a deeper exploration of how to use it in the context of war and politics.

In the first pages of the *Phenomenology*, which is one of Hegel's earlier works, and also serves as an introduction to his system of philosophy, Hegel explains his approach in the very first pages by discussing a paradox, or what he refers to as an 'apprehensiveness'<sup>297</sup>: the fact that one can regard cognition as either an instrument for understanding or constructing the world in way that makes it intelligible, or else as a medium, a lens through which the world makes itself known to us. The problem being that in either case, the truth is not arriving at us in its pure form, but either as a one that is distorted by the medium or shaped by the instrument.<sup>298</sup> Hegel is in fact attempting to create a philosophy that falls into neither category, but tries to be both in the very process of being neither. The very same way in which Hegel describes his system, is in fact his system itself, and this becomes clear when we consider how he applies it to man's first level and simplest form of understanding, which is perception, or how we achieve sense-certainty in space and time, through such a process overcoming oppositions.

To situate where this is coming from, it is necessary first to return to the legacy of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which was studied briefly in the previous chapter. Having spliced human understanding along the lines of mutually exclusive categories, where theology and the sciences no longer co-existed, Kant had created a chasm between the real and the ideal. In answer to this impasse, Hegel questioned its very premise on the grounds that it was impossible for an idea to be beyond or outside the scope of the real world, since the very act of conceiving an idea happens in the

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<sup>297</sup> Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. Baillie, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. p.28

<sup>298</sup> Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. Baillie, 2<sup>nd</sup>, p. 28



real world. Hegel thereby exposed a major contradiction at the very heart of Kantian thought, in that this abstract world of ideas, which is supposedly external to actual thought, is in fact posited by thought in the first place.<sup>299</sup> To break down the divide between the real and the ideal, Hegel proposed rather that, ‘what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational,’<sup>300</sup> in effect transitioning from the dichotomous chasm left by Kant, to a higher order of understanding meant to encompass both the real and the ideal realms.

To do this, Hegel returned to the original problem formulated by Hume, questioning the possibility of ‘necessary connection’, which had been the central impetus for Kant’s work, and then he turned it on its head. Hume had argued that, ‘we are never able, in a single instance, to discover any power or necessary connection,’<sup>301</sup> and now Hegel, instead of accepting that necessary connection was not in the purview of human understanding, would reverse the question and generate instead a ‘system of necessary connection’,<sup>302</sup> in which necessary connection is no longer the unattainable conceptual end that Hume had uncovered, nor must it lead to Kant’s strict categorization, but is in fact the universe’s underlying logic itself, a dialectical process by which the ideal becomes manifest in the real world, or what Hegel referred to as the ‘spirit of the world’, or ‘Geist’.

The implications of this are significant, because if ‘what is actual is rational’ and ‘what is rational is actual’, then the logic behind this universe depends on the fact that the rational can be actualized and the actual can just as well be rationalized. This is the major objective of Hegelian thought. He was trying to show us how these processes take place. In the first pages of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel starts by

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<sup>299</sup> Charles Taylor. *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 117

<sup>300</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, preface, p. 10.

<sup>301</sup> David Hume. *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), p. 63

<sup>302</sup> Taylor. *Hegel*, p. 128

demonstrating how reason works, by using the simplest form, where the individual perceives his world and become self-conscious. However as we read onwards, we realize that reason builds upon these first steps and raises itself into more complex levels. Yet, no matter how complex knowledge happens to be, Hegel presents it as developing according to the same logic unfolding at each new and higher layer, where negation plays the central role in the formation of knowledge.

In Hegel's initial section on sense certainty, with which he opens the *Phenomenology*, this process becomes evident. We find that one understands 'seeing' only insofar as one has seen, and then not seen, a same object. This ability to discern between something one sees and something one doesn't see is precisely the basis upon which negation generates knowledge. This process of negation is what one could call a negation upwards, where the simple is transformed into the more complex, where two acts of perception (positive and negative) come together as one process of understanding. But the higher understanding that emerges depends on transcending the contradiction in a way by which the 'lower stage is both annulled and preserved in a higher one.'<sup>303</sup>

For 'seeing' to occur, Hegel explains, the observer and the object observed must be in relation to one another in time and place. Yet, there are a variety of mutually exclusive possibilities within this occurrence of a relation, given the questions of how we define the 'here' and the 'now'. For example, Hegel proposes that one can be looking 'here' and see a 'tree' or looking at another 'here' and see its opposite, 'not a tree'. Also, the act of seeing is happening 'now' but this could be for example 'day' or 'night'.<sup>304</sup> How can any of the posited ideas be true, if, depending on context, it is possible that the very opposite is just as valid? These are not absolute,

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid. p. 119

<sup>304</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, Tr. Baillie, 2<sup>nd</sup>, p. 35

but rather fleeting notions of truth: ‘Both truths have the same authenticity—the immediacy of seeing and the certainty and assurance both have as to their specific way of knowing; but the one certainty disappears in the other.’<sup>305</sup>

So we reach a first impasse. Now I see a tree, then I turn 180 degrees and, in the new now, I no longer see a tree. Yet, there remains one universally valid reality within these opposites: the ego in either time or space is nonetheless ‘seeing’.<sup>306</sup> Recognizing that one can ‘see’ is the higher level or plateau, but it can only be achieved conceptually as a result of reasoning: if I saw something then, and now I don’t see it, then there must be a relation between these two. The fact that I can distinguish having seen from not seeing is precisely the source of ‘seeing’s’ universality as a concept. It exists outside of me; it is objective, because one can conceptualize both its posited reality and its negated reality. Despite the opposites which were demonstrated, the Here and the Now do not disappear, but continue to exist throughout their disappearance.<sup>307</sup> This is the second moment in the process of cognition: where the negation subdues what has been posited. Yet, something greater has emerged, albeit without a full sense of certainty or even utility yet.

When we try to conceptualize the ‘now’ we go through the same impossibility of seizing it, since as soon as one has pointed it out, it has ceased to be. To understand time, we must conceptualize how the Now is no longer now once it has been identified as now. The truth about the Now is that, when it is shown to us, it is already a ‘has-been’.<sup>308</sup> In this case, the act of ‘pointing out’ is an act of negating. Yet it is in this very ‘movement’ that we uncover its truth: when one acknowledges the ‘has-been’ as ‘having-been’, then the negation is itself negated and the idea is elevated or

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid. p. 36

<sup>306</sup> Ibid. p. 36

<sup>307</sup> Ibid. p. 34-36

<sup>308</sup> Ibid. p. 37

superseded. Hegel describes our knowledge of the Here and the Now as ‘self-reflected movements’, where to achieve knowledge of them, we must have gone through three phases, or what Hegel refers to as ‘moments’: positing, negating, and negating the negation. Unlike the philosophers of the Enlightenment who saw knowledge as a static object for us subjects to grasp, Hegel is making the argument for a concept of knowledge which is in constant flux, a process which advances in time and builds up its own certainty as well as its self-awareness:

It is clear from all this that the dialectic process involved in sense-certainty is nothing else than the mere history of its process—of its experience; and sense-certainty itself is nothing else than simply this history.<sup>309</sup>

The process of overcoming dichotomous pairs and achieving new levels of knowledge is what Hegel calls the ‘Aufhebung’ which translates roughly in English to ‘sublation’. It is the coming together of opposites towards achieving a higher conceptual plateau. While on occasion one might come across this word translated directly as ‘negation’ or ‘invalidation,’ these undermine an important aspect of the process: what is sublated is neither lost and vanished nor is it made false, but rather incorporated. Through ‘Aufhebung’, ‘the higher unity integrates the principles found at the lower level and supplies new content on its own. The principles at the lower level acquire new patterns of meaning by being integrated into the higher conception.’<sup>310</sup> This is how knowledge develops and materializes in time, not only in scope, but also in depth and richness as its scope gives us a glimpse into its parts. It is

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid. p. 37

<sup>310</sup> Terry Pinkard. ‘Freedom and Social Categories in Hegel's Ethics’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Dec., 1986), p. 232

enhanced through each opposition and overcoming of opposition.<sup>311</sup> Indeed, every *Aufhebung* becomes the starting point for a new triad. The *Aufhebung* having been posited, it thereby must also eventually find itself annulled and preserved over time. Thus, Hegel explains that truth, all truth, is a process of creating and developing itself over time:

The truth is the whole. The whole, however, is merely the essential nature reaching its completeness through the process of its own development. Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a result.<sup>312</sup>

If we saw in the question of sense-certainty, Hegel's micro-level of analysis, we are now catching a glimpse of the other extreme, the macro-level, which is useful here, because it gives us a sense of where the individual and the state exist, somewhere between these two poles. Given that he was answering Kant's discussion of the universe and its breakdown into the real and the ideal; Hegel had to conceptualize the whole as well. If reason is indeed making its way through time, materializing and deepening itself as a process of encountering and overcoming dichotomies. Should there be an end point to this progress of knowledge, it could only be one thing, the whole of knowledge reflected onto itself and recognizing itself objectively as this whole. There is a godly aura to this, as though the universe is somehow the spirit making itself manifest in the universe. Hegel considers that 'reason' materialized is a real whole, it is imbued with a certain substantive life of its own, a power of sorts, but only insofar as it has become objective, or self-aware of its

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<sup>311</sup> Raymond Plant. *Hegel, An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 139

<sup>312</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, Tr. Baillie 2<sup>nd</sup>. p. 8

totality. Hegel refers to this self-awareness of reason as a whole, negated and transcended into objectiveness as the 'spirit of the world' or 'Geist'. Hence, the 'Geist' represents the ultimate synthesis of all that is ideal with all that is actual. Existing within it and one could say 'for it', individuals and states give the spirit its shape and substantive life: they are the 'vehicles' by which Geist exists in the world. 'In this process,' Taylor explains, 'men come to a new understanding of self: they see themselves not just as individual fragments of the universe, but rather as vehicles of cosmic spirit. And hence, men can achieve at once the greatest unity with nature, i.e. with the spirit which unfolds itself in nature'<sup>313</sup> That is to say, in a world of inherent oppositions and contradiction, the arrival at certainty and unity in the world is achieved as a process, a method that consists of becoming aware of paradoxes and learning to integrate them into our understanding onwards to larger and more complex paradoxes.

In order to move now into a discussion of politics then, we must keep in mind that this realm occurs somewhere in the mid-section between Hegel's most basic form of material history, sensory knowledge, and its complete form having cosmic proportions. The logic that generates this mid-section is no different for Hegel, and it also advances and develops itself as the progression of rationality making itself evermore manifest in the universe throughout history.

### State Interest & Contingency in International Law

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<sup>313</sup> Idem.

A good place to start in our quest to understand the basic form of Hegel's political philosophy is to contrast it with Kant's famous essay *Perpetual Peace*. Published in 1795, the short manifesto stands out not only as one of Kant's last articles, but also because it is also one of the rare political pieces he wrote. The two philosophers had extremely opposed views on the question and the process of deconstructing the parts of the argument will help us build up a better understanding of how Hegel's opposite conclusion stems from its basis in a distinct philosophical system from which the modern or ideal state is not assumed as a thing in itself so much as an idea that emerges in history and asserts itself materially as a right of constituted free men.

Timing explains part of the disagreement. Kant was writing at the height of the French Revolution, fuelled therefore by a certain optimism regarding the possibilities for peace among the emerging republics. Europe at the time was still scarred by the memory of the Seven Years' War, which had been fought on an unprecedented scale: the size of the engagements as well as the global reach of the conflict, beyond oceans. The war had been so expensive that it would alter the geopolitics of Europe, kings were bankrupted, heavily indebted and on the decline, while bourgeois class rose in wealth, power and prestige, a presage of years to come. Many still viewed the Seven Years' War as completely unjustified because of relative imbalance between the level of violence and the futility of its objectives. Voltaire's description was particularly pithy: 'It is another kind of folly. You know that these two countries are at war for a few acres of snow in Canada, and they spend over this beautiful war much more than Canada is worth.'<sup>314</sup> The arrival of new regimes provided a hope that war, these

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<sup>314</sup> Voltaire, *Candide* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1918), p. 67

violent whims of a disconnected and irresponsible nobility, belonged to less advanced, less perfected forms of government.

Hegel, on the other hand, was writing after the Napoleonic Wars, and consequently was perhaps rather less hopeful and optimistic. He had seen the power of counter-revolution, the massive effect of France's *levées en masse*, and the passions and power of its citizen-army as they brought war from one end of Europe to another. In this context, he could not think of war as merely an unjustified game played by kings for the control of populations to tax and colonies to exploit. He had to ask himself if free citizens of France had the right to wage war against counter-revolutionary movements coming from Austria, England or Russia, and to spread the new constitutions and liberties of the revolution abroad. If war could be justified for reasons of independence from foreign occupiers or to safeguard the institution of a government for and by the people, what exactly was the source of this right, how was it ethically constructed? This was the finality of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, which begins with a discussion of the formation of individual rights and moves towards the question of the rights of states.

Historical context explains in part why Kant could easily understand war as a defect of the political system, attributable to royal discretion, moral decadence and the failure of reason to prevail, but more importantly, the Enlightenment's optimism and its ideal of 'perfectibility' was still present in Kant's writing.

The principle of the moral politician will be that if defects have slipped either into the constitution of the state or into the relations of states with



one another, it is principally the duty of the chiefs to make instantly such amendments as are conformable to the natural right founded on reason.<sup>315</sup>

According to Kant, providence, destiny and nature have the ‘aim to produce a harmony among men, against their will and indeed through their discord.’<sup>316</sup> Hence, while Kant’s sympathies in the matter of revolution were on the side of the French Revolution, his sympathies in the matter of war were squarely with peace.<sup>317</sup> Republicanism, Kant argued, allowed reason to reign, not only internally, but also in interstate relations. War represented a threat to these structures of rationality, which explains why Kant wrote that ‘reason, from its throne of supreme moral legislating authority, absolutely condemns war as a legal recourse and makes a state of peace a direct duty, even though peace cannot be established or secured except by a compact of nations.’<sup>318</sup> Kant sought a ‘judiciary order’ for the world, and only the federative model could achieve this while respecting the freedoms of states.<sup>319</sup> Through federation, states would establish a world sphere governed by reason, where laws and reciprocity among state would lead to morality on an international scale. Kant’s Preliminary Articles enumerated a set of such laws to reduce and limit the causes of war among states, including for example the signing of secret treaties, the purchase or exchange of states amongst powers, the way in which foreign debt was contracted, and the abolition of standing armies.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace* (London: Verner and Hood, 1796), p. 50

<sup>316</sup> Kant, Project for a Perpetual Peace (cited by Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, p.52)

<sup>317</sup> Hannah Arendt. *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.52

<sup>318</sup> Kant. *Project for a Perpetual Peace* (cited by Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, p.52)

<sup>319</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace* (London: Verner and Hood, 1796), p. 72.

<sup>320</sup> Kant, Project for a Perpetual Peace, ed. Vincent Ferraro, Mount Holyoke College, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/kant/kant1.htm>

At first reading of Hegel's reaction to this proposal, one might be tempted to call it a pragmatists' take. But there is much more to it. Without a higher power to impose international law, Hegel argued that these best intentions would crumble whenever states failed to achieve consensus or harmonization of policy. By resting a world order atop the sovereignty of states, international law would be doomed to existing only as mere contingency, rules that 'ought to be kept' but can never 'go beyond an ought-to-be',<sup>321</sup> because:

There is no Praetor to judge between states; at best there may be an arbitrator or mediator, and even he exercises his functions contingently only, i.e. in dependence on the particular wills of the disputants. Kant had an idea for securing 'perpetual peace' by a League of Nations to adjust every dispute. It was to be a power recognized by each individual state, and was to arbitrate all cases of dissension in order to make it impossible for disputants to resort to war in order to settle them. This idea presupposes an accord between states; this would rest on moral or religious grounds and considerations, but in any cases would always depend ultimately on particular sovereigns will and for that reason would remain infected with contingency.

It follows that if states disagree and their particular wills cannot be harmonized, the matter can only be settled by war.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Hegel. *The Philosophy of Right*, #333, p. 213

<sup>322</sup> Hegel. *The Philosophy of Right*, #333, p. 213-214

A simplistic reading of these passages can lead one to describe Hegel as an early equivalent of 20<sup>th</sup> century realists, who sees states and their agents moralistically as 'bad' or unable to operate within the framework of international norms and laws. However, his view is quite contrary to this, for Hegel saw in the state a higher order of reason an instrument for materializing the 'ethical life' within it, where the common good constitutes a higher sphere which integrates but does not submerge the claims of individuality.<sup>323</sup> Actually, the reason why Hegel's ideal state is not expected to fully submit itself to an external international order, beyond contingency and national interest, is not that it is subjectively bad in its external dealings, but the opposite, because it is objectively good in its internal purpose, which is to protect its citizens' freedoms and interest.

Where Hegel and Kant agreed with regard to war, was that it is an act of discretion. And while Kant saw that as a bad thing, Hegel rather thought that as long as it is an act of discretion that belongs to freely constituted citizens, it is imbued with the ethics inherent to the state. Hegel understood the state as having a universal character, for when citizens constitute the state, they are creating an absolute power under which all are governed equally, an ethical realm in which laws can be legitimately written, and legitimately enforced: the 'substance of the state [is that it has an] absolute power against everything individual and particular, against life, property, and their rights, even against societies and associations.'<sup>324</sup> In order for the state to be everything that it pertains to be internally, universal and absolute, it must equally embody this 'universal' character in its exterior dealings. It does not need to impose its laws on other states, but the very process of encountering other states

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<sup>323</sup> Terry Pinkard. 'Freedom and Social Categories in Hegel's Ethics', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Dec., 1986), p. 221

<sup>324</sup> Hegel. *The Philosophy of Right*, #323, p. 209

confirms its own universality, in reciprocation. By recognizing the existence of states and their own universality, it reaffirms its own concept of 'self':

The negative relation of the state to itself is embodied in the world as the relation of one state to another and as if the negative were something external. [...] This negative relation is that moment in the state which is most supremely its own, the state's actual infinity as the ideality of everything finite within it. [...] [become] an accomplished fact [bringing] it home to consciousness.<sup>325</sup>

We can now see more clearly why treaties and international systems find themselves always subject to contingency and state interest. The very process of interacting with other states creates within the state a higher appreciation of its own universal role towards its constituents. The rise of self-consciousness within the state is reciprocal amongst states and thus reinforces contingency at every step that is taken towards harmonization and cooperation. The contradiction becomes truly evident when we consider treaties like the Kyoto Protocol or the Convention on Biodiversity, where numerous signatories are actively, consciously, strategically, and systematically undermining their own commitments, despite having ratified certain obligations into national law. Contingency is inherent to treaty making, and to blame treaty failures on morality is to pass the buck: vilifying individuals and political parties, instead of seeing in their actions a systemic weakness in the concept international law in the first place.

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<sup>325</sup> Idem.

This leaves us with a question: is there legitimacy to the state's subjectivity? If Hegel relegates war to the ethical legitimacy of statehood, what is this ethical ground upon which the state is elevated? What gives the state the 'right' to view all other forms of law making, including international treaties as 'mere contingency'? For Hegel, this special status of the state depends on its ability to provide freedom to its citizens. That is the moral basis for the state's right to act upon the world. And this at times, can be taken to mean war.

That being said, Hegel was by no means an advocate of war, nor did he believe society should be organized in a Spartan or militaristic tradition. Rather, he hoped wars would be rare and only fought for vital interests of the state, such as the redress of injustices or the protection of national independence. Plamenatz notes that:

The Prussians had fought a hard war against Napoleon which had led to domestic reforms and to a burst of patriotism which had other good effects. It is not surprising that a German who had lived through the war of liberation should have believed that war was good for the moral health of the people [...] Hegel does not advocate frequent or continuous wars or suggest that war is the noblest activity of man.<sup>326</sup>

Many passages from Hegel's works show him 'to have been acutely aware of its evils, even though he held that there were times when it was both necessary and right [...] nothing in his words justifies the charge that he "glorified" war, and to maintain that he did is to give an extravagant and misleading description of his

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<sup>326</sup> John Plamenatz. *Man and Society* (London: Longmans, 1963), pp. 142-143

ideas.<sup>327</sup> To illustrate this, we can turn to Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, in which he wrote:

Now in Europe each nation is limited by another one and it should not, arbitrarily, start a war against another. When we traverse the realm of morality up to its highest stage, the life of the state, and watch whether its purposes are fulfilled or not, we certainly will experience that many are, but more, even the greatest and noblest of them, are spoiled and frustrated through the passions and viciousness of man.<sup>328</sup>

There is a clear distinction between to be made between the fact that someone may disagree with the premises of international perpetual peace, and making the argument that he who stands on this side of the argument is a war monger. It rather comes down to a question of ethics, rather than a question of war and peace. One should be asking what kind of peace shall we have, and will it be a good peace? Or shall this peace be the undoing of what we hold as the central purpose of modern citizenship: individual freedom? Where is the greater good? It is this notion of a greater good versus a lesser evil that frames the overarching question: what constitutes an *ethically justifiable* war?

From these questions, we can begin framing the disagreement between the two philosophers based on their distinct definitions of freedom, especially with regard to how this idea exists in the relationship between state and citizen. To begin with, Pinkard explains:

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<sup>327</sup> Constance Smith. 'Hegel On War', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1965), pp. 282-285.

<sup>328</sup> Idem. (quoting various passages from Hegel)

The basic concept for Hegel's ethics – like that of Kant – is freedom. The Philosophy of Right is an articulation via dialectical argumentation of what the ontological and institutional conditions for freedom would be. Both Hegel and Kant are concerned with explaining the possibility of freedom. However, whereas Kant's explanation rests on the idea of the will's legislating for itself, Hegel [...] [would argue that] only when our straightforward desires (the particulars) coincide with our evaluations of what would be good and right to desire (the universal), is our will truly free.<sup>329</sup>

Thus, both authors agree that freedom is rational, but whereas Kant's freedom stands alone, Hegel's freedom is contingent on there being consistency between what one might call the immediate good and the greater good. When applied to the state, this consistency takes the form of there being a mutually constitutive freedom which arises jointly from the state and the citizen. The coinciding of universal and particular desires is pursued in time by the state contributing to the enhancement and development of the individual's empowerment and freedom to act out his or her desires. The state doesn't simply grant freedom to its citizens, it is the act of becoming a state, the mutual recognition of citizens that *constitutes the individual as free*, and this, Hegel understands as an enhancement of individual freedom, making the individual *more free, more complete* than he could be outside the state or in the natural world. Ultimately, the state's existential justification *is* its effect on human development (and here the UNDP, with its Human Development Index, would likely agree). The state is this freedom itself. And while it can appear instrumental, in a

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<sup>329</sup>Terry Pinkard, *Freedom and Social Categories in Hegel's Ethics*, p 210-211

sense, that is, the citizen empowers him or herself through and by the state, the state is not for this reason a mere tool of freedom, but the embodiment of freedom in which the individual is elevated to freedom and takes possession of their actions in the world.

### The State as an Ethical Realm

Before taking on any concrete form, whether a border crossing, barracks, a parliament, a president or a passport; the ideal Hegelian state is first and foremost a state of mind, an idea that binds people within a single political community, and makes itself manifest through the creation and upkeep of various institutions, founding documents, laws, etc. The idea of state also includes mutual recognition of legal and political rights amongst citizens, which can, for example, take the form of abiding by the outcome of election, even if one is on the losing side of it. These consensual relationships are however paradoxical in that they are at any time being coerced onto the people by the state structures, while also being willed by the people themselves. The state structures are composed of people: judges, police, public servants, politicians, etc. all of whom are making decisions and taking actions within a code of conduct which frames their duties and obligations within the state apparatus. That is to say, that whether one is *willing* the form of the laws and institutions of the state, or one is *forming* the will of the laws and institutions of the state, all are acting within a frame of mind with regard to what they perceive as the greater good, in abstraction of personal gain, but in concordance with personal goodness in the



conduct of the affairs of the state. Thus, it can indeed be claimed that beyond its material features, the state is beyond these, an ethical frame of analysis, within which people are making decisions and taking action within the state.

As we saw while discussing perpetual peace and the relation of freedom between state and citizen, it is possible and perhaps even beneficial, when reading Hegel, to move away from the metaphysical implications of materialized reason as a cosmic or higher power as we saw above, and instead view individuals and states as ‘vehicles’ of reason for its own sake, for the immediate benefits of applied rationality, as opposed to the continuing quest to make sense of the divine, by further rationalizing its existence. Frost proposes that by excluding the higher end metaphysical aspects of Hegel’s system, we can focus in on how Hegel established a ‘constitutive theory of the individual,’<sup>330</sup> where the state exists conceptually as the ‘Aufhebung’ of individuals acceding to higher levels of reason by transcending or surpassing simpler forms of social unity to more abstract or more ‘reasoned’ or intellectually constructed forms, from family life, to civil society, to citizenship within the state. These ‘moments’ in the development or actualization of the self represent three distinct ethical realities, which exist, develop and come to fruition as the state (which is both an idea in its citizens as well as a material expression of this idea in the world).

Hegelian dialectics are central to his understanding of politics, because the state and the individuals exist in history and are part of its progression. The individual at birth is not the same as the emancipated and empowered adult citizen. But the process that leads individuals from their birth and family life, to existence in a society of others, to becoming part of the actual governance of this society represent three

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<sup>330</sup> Mervyn Frost. *Towards a Normative Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 161-184

distinct conceptual plateaus which are linked in that each one, emerges from the *Aufhebung* of the preceding one. They are tied dialectically to one another. And while the individual develops in time by further 'constituting' himself as a full participant of the state, a dialectical reverse to this can also be perceived. The more the state exists as an individual and social idea, the greater the state itself is materialized in the world. The state is a tool that contributes to constituting, developing the individual, while the process of individual constitution is the state itself. A state without citizens is no state. It is a mutually-binding and mutually-building relationship.

Hegel built this constitutive theory in reaction to the 'contractarian' tradition we find in Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. The difference between the two approaches is how they reconcile individual rights with state sovereignty. In contract theory, the autonomous rights holder agrees to subject himself to the state out of self-interest, to secure his rights.<sup>331</sup> Thus, the individual is the true sovereign, and the state is an institution serving this fundamental sovereignty. The state comes into being because the individual has willed it and accepted self-imposed constraints. On the other hand, 'for constitutive theory, to be a rights holder at all already presupposes a constraining relationship with other people.'<sup>332</sup>

One of the reasons why Hegel is often cited alongside examples of totalitarianism is that he was in fact deeply against the idea of humans being endowed with 'natural rights'. 'Hegel [was] better known as a critic of rights than as a defender. In the first place, he attacked natural rights theories for proposing an "atomistic" conception of the self as denuded of all cultural traits and characteristics.'<sup>333</sup> In the Hegelian tradition, rights are not considered to be a-priori

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<sup>331</sup> Frost. *Towards a Normative Theory of International Relations* p. 164

<sup>332</sup> Idem.

<sup>333</sup> Steven B. Smith. What Is "Right" In Hegel's Philosophy of Right? *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (Mar., 1989), pp. 3-18

conditions of human existence, but rather posited within the social context. These emerge and grow in scope and depth as the individual transitions into increasingly complex relationships from those within the family, to interactions in civil society, and finally at the state and citizen level. Hegel's central criticism of the contractarian methodology, as Benhabib explains, was that:

It ignores the condition of men in the human community and begins with an arbitrary abstraction called the 'state of nature'. The modern tradition falsely considers human nature or rationality to be given, argued Hegel. As long as individuals are seen as complete and mature outside the bounds of ethical life, as long as their fundamental nature is juxtaposed to their life in civil society, the relation of the individual to the ethical community is perceived as accidental.<sup>334</sup>

Instead of making judgments regarding man's rights in nature, Hegel is analyzing man within his social system, arguing that his rights are built up and strengthened by the increased rationalization of social relations which we find in the state, and these are protected or guaranteed by sovereignty. The constitutive theory of the state tries to understand the individual processes that lead to the state, and the effect of the state on the individual, arguing that this process or rationalization, or Geist, allows individuals to form something greater than themselves, and, through this process, achieve a final and higher state of personal development as well. The individual is born into freedom within the family unit, but freedom as it exists in the family is incomplete and limited. It is confined in emotion and is inward facing. This

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<sup>334</sup> Seyla Benhabib. 'Obligation, Contract and Exchange', *The State & Civil Society*, Ed. Pelczynski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 170

leads to an impasse and dissolution that only civil society can resolve. But civil society itself is found to be incomplete itself, unless the freedom it produces can be enforced, and protected, which ultimately leads to the full actualization of freedom that comes with citizenship in the state.

Starting with families, Hegel recognizes that certain forms of family life are unethical. For example, in Roman law, the father was granted the right to the life or death of his own children, or the right to sell them off into slavery. This, Hegel argued was inadmissible, since the ethical basis for an ideal family is that the child must be considered a nascent autonomous or free person in becoming.<sup>335</sup> Only 'love' can thus bind such a family, for there is no gain or proprietorship in the family relationship. However this very strength is also the family's greatest shortcoming, from the perspective of individual development, because basing one's rights on mere 'feelings' is not enough. Feelings cannot be demanded as a right since they are inherently changeable, and therefore they are not as secure a basis for ethical life as laws, which are consciously recognized instead of being merely felt. The family's second shortcoming stems from the individual not being fully capable of expressing their personality, since they are forever a part of the family unit, a member.<sup>336</sup> In order to pursue their development, the individual must eventually break the bonds of the family and engage with the world outside, to seek 'the development and realization of his particular needs, interests and purposes'.<sup>337</sup> Far from destroying the family, when one leaves the family and goes out into the world, they bring with them what they have learned to be as part of the family, and they also bring back to the family whatever recognition they might gain in the next level of ethical life, civil society.

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<sup>335</sup> Frost. *Towards a Normative Theory of International Relations*, p. 168-169

<sup>336</sup> Ibid. p. 169-170

<sup>337</sup> John Charvet. *A Critique of Freedom and Equality* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 177

The family has been negated, but integrated into the next plateau of development: civil society.

Hegel was the first to distinguish civil society from the state. He used the term to 'describe the particular dimension of the modern state as a political community – the 'civil' sphere in which individuals seek to satisfy each others' needs through work, production and exchange; in which there is a thorough-going division of labour and a system of social classes; and in which law courts, corporate bodies and public regulatory and welfare authorities ('the police') promote security and property, livelihood and other rights'<sup>338</sup> In his own words, Hegel described 'civil society' as 'the battlefield where everyone's individual private interest meets everyone else's.'<sup>339</sup> While property might exist within the family as a whole, it did not feature within the family internal ethics; however, in civil society, property becomes the definitive aspect of relations on this level, where people who are born free and equal can now test this equality and freedom by engaging in private interactions in the public space generated by the state for them to do so. In this sense, Hegel was not at all a friend of aristocracy, though his detractors have attempted to brand him this way – the way private interest and public authority attract and repel each other makes aristocracies verge on tyranny and anarchy.<sup>340</sup>

Civil society is also an ethical realm, albeit on a different intellectual level as the one which develops within the family. Its laws and norms, its expectations regarding trustworthiness, fairness, virtue, in fact, every process of operating material exchanges within civil society is a process of rationalizing interactions between individuals. This rationalization which is shaped in law provides increased

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<sup>338</sup> Pelczynski. p. 61

<sup>339</sup> Hegel. *Philosophy of Right*, #289, p. 189

<sup>340</sup> Edward Black, Hegel on War, *The Monist*, Vol. 57, No. 4, *Philosophy of War* (OCTOBER, 1973), p. 580

efficiencies because it creates predictability, regularity, and coercive guarantees. ‘The regulation of social life through general norms,’ explains Benhabib, ‘guarantee uniformity of treatment and render the behaviour of the central authority predictable, from the standpoint of modern economic and legal actors.’<sup>341</sup> Unlike the family, transactions in civil society cannot be (or rather could not rationally be) bound in ‘love’ towards everyone else in society. Therefore, they depend on a different set of values, a different ethical realm involving contracts for the exchange of property and services. If love is what allowed the individual to be recognized as a nascent free individual within the family, it also places a limit to what freedom can be enjoyed within it. Love is a subjective feeling within the family that is there but cannot be earned, it is unsatisfactory to the individual’s development. Once children have been ‘educated to freedom of personality and have come of age within the family, they become recognized as person in the eyes of the law;’<sup>342</sup> they go forth into society and found their own families. Yet, within the family, one could only experience the ethical idea, freedom, still in its concept, it is a particularity, not a universal principle, always inward facing rather than all-encompassing. This is what causes the dissolution of the family and the emergence of civil society, the need for the individual to transition and develop their freedom relative to others, through mutual recognition of such a principle in the external world.<sup>343</sup> Only in civil society will the individual discover all others, and by recognizing their rights, and perceiving their recognition of his rights, will he at last confirm or take possession of his status as a objective ‘rights’ holder, rather than someone merely born into rights.

Hegel’s system distinguishes itself strongly from Rousseau’s social contract. With Hegel, the idea of contracts exists only in the realm of ‘civil society’, that is,

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<sup>341</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *Obligation, Contract and Exchange*, p. 167

<sup>342</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, #177, p. 118

<sup>343</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, #181, p. 122

neither at the family level or the state level, which are the other two moments in this constitutive process. He disagrees with Rousseau's social contract on the grounds that it implies a mere amalgamation of sovereign individuals in contract.<sup>344</sup> For Hegel, the individual is neither born sovereign, nor does the state grant individuals sovereignty. The existence of the state as sovereignty, actually renders personal sovereignty impossible: the individual has no right to make and apply his own, subjective laws and attempt to impose them on others. In the state, men are no longer in the same state of freedom that they were prior to being citizens. Freedom has either been restricted or transformed, and the new freedom which the state provides is a higher freedom allowing citizens to act at a universal level. In contrast, social contract theory falls short, as Pelczynski explains:

Rousseau's general will remains an artificial construct, the will of all or majority will, instead of becoming the living ethos of a political community.<sup>345</sup>

Unlike Rousseau, Hegel did not see the state as an amalgam of sovereign people who are born free, but rather understands citizenship as the socialization and development of individuals into freedom. Hegel saw the state as the process by which and through which the individual can succeed in his quest for freedom: born predisposed to freedom, but not yet in full possession of this freedom, the individual progresses in society from the family, to civil society to active citizenship. Through these structures and institutions, the individual transcends the natural potential for freedom and achieves a higher form of freedom, mutually recognized, and

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<sup>344</sup> Hegel. *Philosophy of Right*, #258, pp. 155-159

<sup>345</sup> Z.A. Pelczynski. *The State & Civil Society*, Ed. Pelczynski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 63

materialized by institutions which the citizen ultimately takes possession of as well. It is not mere freedom as an endowment, it is freedom that is built up, surpassed and taken as one's own to further develop as one sees fit. It is the ultimate, perfected freedom in that it provides the empowerment, the tool and the personal space required for a free person to define what his or her freedom shall resemble.

This type of freedom is not construed as something one 'has', but something that takes shape through an evolving process of self-constitution, through moments in one's social development. Hegel was positing the existence of three social categories, or as Pinkard explains, 'expressions of a basic form of unity among people – a structure of mutual acknowledgement – in which various moral principles (rights, duties and virtues) are embodied and which explains their possibility, [which Hegel refers to as] "ethical substance".'<sup>346</sup> Within these categories, ethical life, as Hegel understands it [...] is the 'concept of freedom developed into the existing world'.<sup>347</sup> As such it comprises certain specific structures and institutions that are required for, and promote, freedom.<sup>348</sup> Freedom and, equally important, the recognition of freedom in the political community both remain contingent on the presence of a higher power, as Frost explains:

In civil society, the individual gains recognition as a free person able to own property and enter into transactions with other people who are free in the same way. The importance of these rights is recognized in a system of law which is impartially administered and enforced.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Pinkard. *Freedom and Social Categories in Hegel's Ethics*, p. 225

<sup>347</sup> S. Houlgate. Introduction, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. xxvii

<sup>348</sup> Idem.

<sup>349</sup> Frost. *Towards a Normative Theory of International Relations*, p. 172



Unless there exists an impartial guarantor, administrator and enforcer upon which civil society can depend, these interactions and transactions could not take on a universal form. As was the case with the family, an inherent weakness emerges from the very strength of civil society's ethical realm as well. Freedom demands mutual recognition and virtuous dealings among individuals, but these relations which can only exist if guided by a certain degree of self-interest, cannot guarantee themselves as fair, since each side is subjective. There must be an objective arbiter in order for various self-interests in competition to be beneficial and rational in a systematized way. Only a mutually recognized higher authority can act in such a role. Even mediation and arbitration depends on the existence of a higher power that generates contract laws in the first place. At this conjecture, this conflict at the heart of civil society, the idea of state emerges as necessity. A civil society cannot properly operate without this political oversight, rule-making and rule-enforcing.

If civil society was a 'battlefield' where private interest meet, at the state level, 'we have the struggle (a) of private interests against particular matters of common concern and (b) of both of these together against the organization of the state and its higher outlook.'<sup>350</sup> This concept of a 'higher outlook' is essential to the state because it implies the ethical frame of mind which an individual must be in, when thinking as a citizen, a statesman or an administrator of the state. The 'higher outlook' is the source of the state's objectivity towards what is internal to it: its police, its judges and its laws; yet it is equally the source of its subjectivity towards what is external to it. To act as the guarantor of its people's freedoms, the state is infused with structures that protect individuals from individuals whether at the family or civil society level, and equally protect this sovereignty from outside threats to this freedom and

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<sup>350</sup> Hegel. *Philosophy of Right*, #289, p. 189

independence. 'As such, Hegel says, the state must be a 'union' organized for the sake of common defence, and war, or at least the willingness to wage war is a major component of statehood.'<sup>351</sup>

This is where the famous statement, mentioned in the introduction, can take on its full significance and become intelligible. That 'the state is the actuality of concrete freedom' means that it is the materialized fulfilment of individual freedoms within its borders, infused with the external freedom to act and guarantee this internal freedom. Most importantly, to become fully 'actualized' this notion of 'freedom' as embodied by the state must become aware of itself, recognizing its role and purpose in the minds of those who incarnate the state: judges, police, military, civil servants, politicians, etc. In their minds specifically, and in the minds of all citizens more generally, the state becomes self-aware and empowered *to actualize freedom*. Hegel writes:

The state is the actuality of concrete freedom. But concrete freedom consists in this, that personal individuality and its particular interests not only achieve their complete development and gain explicit recognition for their right (as they do in the sphere of the family and of civil society) but, for one thing, they also pass over of their own accord into the interest of the universal, and, for another thing, they know and will the universal; they even recognize it as their own substantive mind; they take it as their end and aim and are active in its pursuit.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Steven Smith. 'Hegel's Views on War, the State, and International Relations', The American Political Science Review, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Sep., 1983), p. 628

<sup>352</sup> Hegel. *The Philosophy of Right*, # 260, p. 160

The ‘actuality of concrete freedom,’ emerges from the same methodology which Hegel used to discover the truth of sense-certainty as a dialectical process in time, but this time applied to the social realm. Freedom is almost construed as a self-fulfilling loop, whereby the individual seeks individual freedom and thus wills himself a state to act as the guarantor of this freedom, but the only way by which it can act as guarantor is for it to be free as well: universal, subjective and potent. When freedom is the ethical grounds upon which society is built, every aspect of society must in the end embody that ethic, and this is achieved by maintaining this dialectical tension between the collective and the individual, the particular and the universal: where each is the source of the other’s greater freedom. And this realization is the third and final moment of the constitutive process: I recognize the state as my own, because through its freedom, my freedom is enhanced and universalized.

The ideal state exists to embody the citizens’ collective best interest in the world, and reciprocally, when the citizen recognizes this purpose of the state, he takes ownership of it – *the state works by me and for me* – and this very appropriation completes itself a moment of the individual’s development: when the individual comes to terms with the negation of his potential individual sovereignty in exchange for a role or space in the universal. This recognition of ownership which Hegel calls patriotism binds the citizens of a state into an ethical whole in a way not entirely different from the way love binds the family or laws bind civil society. Hence, for Hegel, ‘what is common in love and patriotism is that the other is perceived as not being other.’<sup>353</sup> However, the process of subsuming the other leads also to a new concept of ‘others’. If patriotism binds the state, and eliminates other individuals as

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<sup>353</sup> Merold Westphal. *Hegel, Freedom and Modernity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 51

others, it nonetheless generates, perhaps inadvertently, the concept of ‘other peoples’, ‘other states’ to recognize and by whom to be recognized.

The state emerges as a ‘substantive life’ because it is infused with a ‘spirit’ which resides in its institutions and citizens who are called upon to incarnate them. Thus can we speak of a somewhat mystical ‘personality’ or ‘intelligence’, which resides in statehood, where the state’s ‘essential being is the union of the subjective with the rational will.’<sup>354</sup> By embodying both a will that is endowed with rationality, the idea of the state achieves its ‘actualized freedom’, its ability to use its capacity to reason in order to shape the material world. When the state enacts or applies laws, for example, these are real, objective and universal in the eyes of the citizens, despite the fact that they arise subjectively, from the self-consciousness of the state. As Hegel explains,

The state, therefore, knows what it wills and knows it in its universality, i.e. as something thought. Hence it works and acts by reference to consciously adopted ends, known principles, and laws which are not merely implicit but are actually present to consciousness.<sup>355</sup>

If the state emerges as a substantive life, in the process of constitution, and the transcendental process of individuals transforming themselves into citizens, it owes its self-awareness and self-consciousness to a process of reciprocation with other states. The state is confronted with the idea that it is not alone in the world: there are other peoples, other states, interactions, and potential conflicts. That is why Hegel recognizes statehood as being intimately related to war. The independence,

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<sup>354</sup> Idem.

<sup>355</sup> Hegel. *The Philosophy of Right*, # 270, p. 165

sovereignty and territory of the state are not merely founded on its armed forces, but built in conceptually as a necessity. The ethical element in war, Hegel explained, is implied by the final end of the state to provide freedom, individual life, security and property to its people.<sup>356</sup> Thus, ‘war is not to be regarded as an absolute evil and as a purely external accident.’<sup>357</sup> It can be an essential part of a state’s rational necessity.<sup>358</sup> The state makes a *conscious* decision to apply force, grounded ethically on the idea that its actions are conducted in the interest of justice or self-preservation and on behalf of a free and constituted people.

Reciprocally, the psychological internal reality of this ideal state is in many ways tied to war as well. The model citizen of the modern state would retain certain vestiges of ancient Athens: a freeman, democrat, merchant, and militiaman. This would be the foremost expression of the individual cum citizen, transcended and elevated by the state. In this context, we can appreciate in what sense the state cannot merely be an amalgam of individual sovereigns as in the contractarian tradition. The citizens in a constitutive system generate sovereignty; they aggrandize the state in the very process of aggrandizing themselves within this ethical realm that they have created for themselves. Thus, while in the contractarian tradition, the citizen is assumed to be constraining his natural rights for the sake of the social contract, in the constitutive sense, the citizen and the state converge in their mutual freedom: where the state is the source and guarantor of the individual’s particular freedom, and the citizen is the source and guarantor of the state’s universal freedom. And this coexistence is the aggrandizement of the individual, which at its utmost embodiment, self-sacrifice in the name of collective freedom is the epitome of courage.

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid. # 324, p. 209

<sup>357</sup> Ibid. # 324, p. 209

<sup>358</sup> Ibid. # 324, p. 209-210

The intrinsic worth of courage as a disposition of mind is to be found in the genuine, absolute, final end, the sovereignty of the state. The work of courage is to actualize this final end, and the means to this end is the sacrifice of personal actuality [...] a self-sacrifice which yet is the real existence of one's freedom.<sup>359</sup>

Hegel is suggesting that in war, the citizen / state relationship takes on its purest form. The citizen-soldier lives out the state's ethical concept to its absolute depth, where he is willing to die in the application of the state's 'higher outlook' and sovereignty. In this sense, the citizen-soldier is even better positioned than a king to pronounce the words 'L'État, c'est moi,' because, when he fights, the state belongs to the citizen-soldier to the extreme, and the citizen-soldier reciprocally belongs mind and body to the state. Should he choose not to fight, the state would be powerless and dead. Should he turn around in mutiny and dethrone the king, the king would be nothing. The state is the sum of its ethical premise plus its material exertion of authority in pronouncing and enforcing laws, and sustaining independence from outside forces. And while all of these represent an aspect the state's ideal/material reality, none is more powerfully attached to this concept of statehood than the citizen-soldier, because in their bravery and sacrifice, they *are* the state – an ethical concept backed by individuals in arms and who are willing to kill or die to ensure its collective survival. It is only because the state is constructed as an ethical realm worth fighting for, that Hegel could logically uphold the idea that '*War is the moral health of peoples in their struggle against petrification*,'<sup>360</sup> because if a state not worth fighting for, or

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<sup>359</sup> Hegel. *The Philosophy of Right*, #328, p. 211

<sup>360</sup> Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Tr. Baillie (New York: Cosimo, 2005), p. 432

incapable of fighting, it would be reaffirming its mortality and transience, disappearing in history.

### Critique: The Reversibility of War's Relation to the Moral Health of Peoples

The ethical aspect of war in Hegel resides in the fact that the state is presented as a pact of mutual defence among citizens, where the idea of courage and sacrifice epitomizes the ethical bond of statehood's sublime or absolute endpoint. Dying bravely for your country is the ultimate demonstration that the very notion of this country does in fact exist in your mind, in your heart. Hence, for Hegel, war and sacrifice not only invigorate the state externally, they enhance the state in the minds of those who belong to it, which is the most central part of statehood to begin with, the idea which binds it. This, however, suggests that not all forms of warfare necessarily 'reinforce' the idea of statehood, only those actually fought by a mass of citizens. The next question is whether or not all forms of war generate bravery and sacrifice in the minds of men? If not, we would be forced to admit that the Hegelian ethics, while they might be demonstrable in certain contexts, might have significant conceptual limits outside the ideal state fighting what might be bizarrely considered an 'ideal' form of warfare, a war that necessarily makes citizens brave and patriotic.

Where the problem first appears is in the context of usurpation of state power, where a tyrant or oligopoly appropriates for itself political power and force, whether by turning the army against the population, or else hiring mercenary forces to exert the power of the state as opposed to harvesting this power from the citizen base. This would represent a clear example of where we would not be dealing with anything near

an ideal state. In this context, as Machiavelli explained, relying on mercenary forces is a sure way to weaken the prince:<sup>361</sup> even though the sovereign increases his physical power, the ethical whole collapses, because the bonds of mutual defence upon which his of authority and legitimacy rest begin to rot from within. How a state embodies its wars has a direct bearing on whether or not war contributes to the moral health of its people, for in the hands of mercenaries, war can be detrimental to the ethical bonds that make up the body politic in the very act of carrying out policy, because it excludes the citizen from participating as the active element of the state's materialization of policy. However, the fact that mercenary warfare is contrary to the moral health of peoples does not fully undermine Hegel's conclusion either, for the simple fact that in the process of revolt against a tyrant, the citizens united, reclaim their bond as an ethical community, proving in their actions against the usurper that it is the tyranny itself that is the rotten and petrified element of the state, and the revolt is the people's *moral health in action*.

At any given time, a tension exists in the state, residing in two opposite tendencies, one towards political apathy, immobility and pusillanimous comfort within the state at one extreme, counter-poised in reverse by the revolutionary, criminal, or violent anti-state sentiment and actions of others. And as we explained above in Chapter 1, elements of society that tend towards the latter can, in certain situations, be more state-like in their manifestation than the state itself, and infinitely more so than the politically apathetic. It is precisely at the intersection of these conflicting elements which can exist within the state that there appears a paradox in Hegel's theory: the process of statehood is a quest to enhance and manifest freedom in the world, but the more it achieves this goal, the more complete its materialization,

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<sup>361</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince*, tr. W.K. Marriott (Rockville: Arc Manor, 2007), pp. 54-59



the greater the two above internal threats become. The state cannot, on the one hand, provide freedom from the state to those who seek to abolish it, and on the other hand, it cannot undermine the provision of freedom which was its goal in order to vitalize those who have found comfort and apathy within it. Thus, the tension is inherent to the state, and becomes tenser as the state develops and empowers itself. What this means is that even Hegel's ideal state is not totally free from the truest form of internal social decay: an interaction that opposes a fledging defence of the state against a powerful dissension. And if this is true of the ideal state, then how much more so might it be in an imperfect state?

One can interpret from Hegel that war is to be understood as the moral health of peoples because it is the moment, the process whereby the citizen takes full possession of the state and the state takes full possession of the citizen. This should not be understood as claiming that Hegel was an advocate of participatory democracy or suggesting that the consent of the citizens is necessary to the creation of authoritative and legitimate policy, but rather that policy's enactment can be modified or stunted in its potency by the unwillingness to comply. That being said, if state legitimacy is not *necessarily* tied to citizen consent, this should not be taken to mean that no consent, not even tacit consent, is necessary to generate authority. In the opposite contractarian viewpoint, the citizen is understood to have a permanent and natural 'right' to refuse to comply and act out the policy of state, because the premise of this philosophy is that the individual is sovereign, he is the focal point of legitimacy and authority, and merely *in a contractual relation with the state* at any given time. From a constitutive perspective, however, the individual is not sovereign. He is not endowed with any such right. And to claim it is to revolt, to *de-constitute* oneself. It is not an affirmation of the natural self, but the opposite... the *de-*

*affirmation* of the constituted self. Though this de-constitution is an act that poses a challenge to the idea of legitimacy, what revolt and mutiny actually do is weaken authority in very real, concrete ways, the objection of conscience stops authority from manifesting itself physically.

Exclusion is the Achilles' heel of the constitutive approach to understanding the state, because regardless of whether it comes from de-constitution at the individual level, policy, or even technology, it breaks the concept of state as mutual ownership between citizen and state. The difference between constitutive and contractarian traditions is precisely this, that the latter is contingent – an amalgam of sovereigns – while the former is bound in necessity, neither is free from the other, since both the freedom of the person and of the state depend on the relationship. The problem, therefore, with exclusion is that even if the state continues to preserve and enhance freedom for its people relatively and internally, the exclusion of the citizen base from the collective security of the nation renders the citizen *less free* in one very important way: they lose their most important power within the state, which is to embody, *to be* the state's freedom. In the context of usurpation, this is what salvages the moral health of peoples, since when the authority has broken with the citizens, then the unwillingness to comply, the objection of conscience, the decision to reverse the policy of the state by refusing to act, all these become acts of de-constitution. Non-violent mutiny and revolt is the last resort of the citizen-soldier's political and ethical power within the state: to act as a pendulum, constant and balanced, but which only swings back when pushed to unethical extremes or when the bonds of statehood have been destroyed.

For a recent example of this we can turn to Libya, where anti-Gaddafi rebels fought on land, and one fighter pilot crashed his own jet so as not to attack them. Had

this been a drone and not a fighter, the situation would have been different: the pilot would have been arrested on-base, court-martialled, and another drone pilot would have stepped in to finish the job; meanwhile the Libyan pilot could eject, land in rebel hands, to safety. One might say the drone is the modern mercenary, because it does not have the ethical bonds of statehood infused in the way it carries out its mission, not when it is remote controlled, and far less so if it is fully automated. The difference is the ability to enact individual conscience on the battlefield: this is where peaceful mutiny lies. However, without this pressure valve, represented by the individual soldier and his moral choices, tyrants would be far more difficult to depose once they had risen. And this relationship between tyranny and revolt is the key to uncovering where the right to wage war belonging to the state reaches its limits: first in the individual refusing to wage war on behalf of the state, which is the passive form, or in the active form, the emergence of either a revolt or a revolutionary war against the state itself, which represents a counterpoise to the state's right to wage war, a fight to eliminate the sovereign's hold on power, to reclaim and reaffirm the constitution of the people.

If the exclusion of the citizen from the state's enactment of political violence is a natural limit to the notion that war is a right of the state, because it reverses the relationship between a state's 'moral health' and warfare, this is harmful to Hegel's argument not because it undermines his logic, in the context of an ideal state where this is not the case, but because it further limits the possibility that such an ideal state can ever take form: usurpation is a constant threat, the relationship between apathy and revolt is an inherent pressure against the ideal, and finally, as technology increasingly distances warfare from hand to hand combat and individual acts of bravery, there is no going back to the heyday of warfare, the exclusion of the citizen

from the application of foreign policy is irreversible, state power is transferred from the citizen to the machinery of state.

The exclusion of the citizen from manifesting the will of the state can take on various forms, such as revolt, mutiny, apathy, exclusion as a feature of policy (i.e. mercenaries) or exclusion as a technological feature, but regardless of which this is, it can be argued that in the process, the citizen has become *less free*, not because he or she has lost their so-called ‘rights’ as individual sovereigns, but the opposite, they have found themselves excluded from the constituted authority and legitimacy to which they belong, and which reversely should belong to them. This strikes at the centre of the ideal state, because the very *raison d’être* and *modus operandi* of the Hegel’s ideal state is to be a mutual process of actualizing and enhancing freedom, but even an ideal state, could it be materialized, would not be free from such factors that breed exclusion at the very heart of it.

## Conclusion

If the purpose of the state is be free to provide the maximum freedom to its citizens by creating a set space where their self-chosen laws are valid, then it needs war, or rather the idea or the possibility of waging war, not only as a guarantee with regard to this space from external threats, but also as a means to resting its authority and ethical claim to that space internally as well, as the possessor of the monopoly of force. In this context, the use of force is not accidental, but a matter of right, under a tradition or better yet a constitution which proclaims it as such. But regardless of how

ideal this constitution is, it is never completely free from the risks of revolt, because revolt lies dormant at all times in the state, and sometimes the very act of repressing it is precisely what awakens it.

War in the hands of the state, or more precisely, in the hands of constituted free citizens is the only basis upon which war can ever be proclaimed as something objectively ethical. This theoretically excludes non-state actors, rebels, tyrants, or usurpers of state power, because their violence cannot achieve the same objectivity. It is necessarily subjective. Of course, when critically assessing this point, we must question whether or not the state apparatuses as we know them today actually have achieved the model Hegel set out for them, or whether this constituted, objective whole actually does take form or if its wars remain subject to any biases, foundational predispositions, or procedural factors, rendering wars of the state no more objective than those of stateless powers. The relationship between war and state is forever befuddled in its quest for objectivity or ‘actualized freedom,’ because even at the epitome of the ‘Idea’, bringing together its universality and potency, there is a root of scepticism that can emerge. The ‘whose universality?’ and the ‘which form of potency?’ become conceptual problems that challenge the Hegelian ideal state, which are further enhanced by the technological and bureaucratic evolution of the modern republic since it was first constituted.

War as a ‘right’ of the state is therefore an imperfect concept. Its limits are in fact best observed at the threshold described above, that of revolt and revolution, because it is precisely here that the objectivity comes to be challenged. Yet, to get a full sense of this challenge, we shall study its most extreme embodiment, found in the Marxist reinterpretation, or rather complete reversal of Hegel, into the basis of an all-out revolutionary doctrine. For this reason we shall soon return to studying the

Hegelian tradition of dialectical war theory as it applied in the context of the great revolutionary doctrines that defined war during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But first, we must consider the parallel and opposite imperfection found in Clausewitz's notion of war as an 'instrument' of the state.

## Chapter 2 – Clausewitz and Hegel: Where the Convergence on Method Begins

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If Hegel's ethical concept of war becomes problematic as it arrives at the threshold of revolution, Clausewitz on the other hand actually started with the problem of revolution in his exploration of war's political and ethical nature. As we saw in Part I, by borrowing Fichte's 'absolute war' he was able to develop war's dual concepts in a way that allowed the coexistence of revolution at one extreme, and the limited scuffles and standstills that war can also become. If it was possible for Clausewitz to rely exclusively on his own experiences and the theories of Fichte and Kant in order to arrive at this chasm between the real and the absolute, what this chapter attempts to show is that in the final years, his work became increasingly in line with the approach developed by Hegel, and it was this approach which informed and shaped his attempt to reconcile the two poles into the formula, 'war is the continuation of policy by other means'.

If Hegel's influence on Clausewitz is so contested, this stems principally from a lack of systematic study. Much like Gat who claims it but does not substantiate it, Brodie went so far as argue that the Hegelian influence was in fact more secure and clear than the Kantian influence.<sup>362</sup> Based on what we have observed in Part I, given

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<sup>362</sup> Bernard Brodie. 'On Clausewitz: A Passion for War - Review of Clausewitz: A Biography by Roger Parkinson', *World Politics*, Vol. 25. No. 2 (Jan 1973), p. 290

the depth and scope of Clausewitz's borrowing from Kant, it is difficult to stand in agreement with Brodie on this. In fact, while there is reason to believe that Hegel is indeed a more important influence, in that his works influenced the best elements of *On War*, it seems that the more mature Clausewitz had perhaps gained in confidence or at least changed his level of dependency on the works of others, for while the impression of the influence is great, the textual proof is little. Clausewitz is nowhere near as transparent in his use of Hegel as he was in his use of Kant, but arguably this has much to do with the confidence he has developed as a dialectician.

If one looks with precision at the word choices, analytical systems and compare these in time between texts written by a younger and an older Clausewitz, there seems to be a Hegelian learning curve. Whereas the texts he wrote earlier in life had nothing Hegelian to them, those written in the final four years of his life very much in line this new method of thinking.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first looks for general hints into the question, particularly historical information and one particular note which Clausewitz wrote while undertaking his final edits. The second, third and fourth sections are concerned with a historical comparison of various Clausewitzian concepts and word choices which evolved over time. They focus respectively on the subjects of 'Aufhebung', 'Intelligence of the personified state', and the coming together of 'real war' and 'absolute war' into the 'continuation of policy by other means.'

### What Happened to Clausewitz in the Late 1820s?



Azar Gat has described Clausewitz's later works as having 'highly distinctive, new intellectual patterns' which support the thesis of a Hegelian influence,<sup>363</sup> though he does not go on to clarify what these patterns are or in what sense they are Hegelian. In order to confirm Gat's claim, it would be useful to substantiate this by bringing more meat to the plate. That being said, before doing so, it is important to recognize that in speaking of Clausewitz as a Hegelian, one must walk a very fine line. The reason for caution stems from the fact that not all aspects of his work are constructed in such a way, in fact, most are not, and those that are most typically Hegelian nonetheless fall slightly short of the mark, as we shall consider in more detail later in this chapter.

Taking this stance means going up against many credible scholars. Peter Paret, for example, makes the case that the question of a Hegelian influence is altogether irrelevant. In *Clausewitz and the State*, Paret dismisses it on the grounds that the dialectic was 'standard equipment in German idealistic and romantic philosophy.'<sup>364</sup> However, this analysis robs his readers of the subtleties of the philosophical aspects of *On War*: Hegelian dialectics are quite different from those of Hume, Kant, Fichte or others, and the failure to discern them does not give proper merit to Clausewitz's technique and erudition. In the case of Paret, this failure to discern should not come as a surprise, given that his knowledge of Hegel appears superficial at best: he makes the popular error to sum up Hegelianism as a system of 'thesis' and 'antithesis',<sup>365</sup> a terminology which Hegel never actually used. Furthermore, there are many examples, which have already been cited above (and more to come below), which suggest that the Howard/Paret translation systematically omits or misrepresents the philosophical

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<sup>363</sup> Gat. *The Origins of Military Thought*, p. 234

<sup>364</sup> Paret. *Clausewitz and the State*, p. 84

<sup>365</sup> Idem.

terms which Clausewitz so often borrowed from his influences in the original German.

At the other extreme, the error of overstating the influence has been made. It is no doubt best exemplified by Paul Creuzinger, who argued in *Hegel's Influence on Clausewitz* (1911) that practically every inch of *On War* could be traced back to Hegel, which is not only farfetched, it is thoroughly impossible, knowing that Hegel was relatively unknown before 1820, when many of Clausewitz's ideas were taking shape.<sup>366</sup> Furthermore, *On War* is scattered with references to so many other influences, such as Scharnhorst, Machiavelli, Kant and Montesquieu, that it seems foolish to claim only one with such vigor. In the case of each of the latter four, Clausewitz is quite transparent with regard to his appreciation: he referred to Scharnhorst as the 'father and friend of my spirit' in a letter to his fiancée;<sup>367</sup> in the case of Machiavelli, not only did he write on the subject directly in a letter to Fichte, he also shared various similarities in his outlook on the question of people's wars (guerrilla)<sup>368</sup> and had shown interest in both the Prince and the Politics in many regards;<sup>369</sup> regarding Montesquieu, he wrote in an editing note that 'Montesquieu was vaguely on my mind'<sup>370</sup>, though the similarity in the argumentative form reveal a 'much deeper affinity';<sup>371</sup> and finally, the debt to Kant, as we saw in the previous chapters is quite considerable.

Unfortunately, for those who seek to reclaim the argument regarding a Hegelian influence, there are no certain references or mentions of Hegel available in

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<sup>366</sup> Gat. *The Origins of Military Thought*, p. 233

<sup>367</sup> A letter to his fiancée, 28 Jan. 1807; K. Linnebach (ed.) Carl und Marie von Clausewitz, Ein Lebensbild in Briefen und Tagebuchblättern (Berlin, 1916), p. 85.

<sup>368</sup> Gat. *The Origins of Military Thought*, p. 203-204

<sup>369</sup> Paret. *Clausewitz and the State*, pp. 169-179

<sup>370</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, tr. Howard/Paret, Author's Comment, p. 63

<sup>371</sup> Gat. *The Origins of Military Thought*, p. 194

the letters or essays by Clausewitz.<sup>372</sup> At best, we have circumstantial evidence, regarding the fact that both men were regular visitors of a common friend, Meusebach,<sup>373</sup> and had been acquainted in the salons of Berlin, given their special parallel status: Hegel was the president of the University of Berlin, while Clausewitz commanded the War College in Berlin.<sup>374</sup> Another common friend, Wilhelm von Humboldt is an interesting one to consider, since we know first of all that both Hegel and Clausewitz were on his guest list.<sup>375</sup> Clausewitz wrote that had discussions on political matters with Humboldt and held him in high esteem.<sup>376</sup> Meanwhile, although Humboldt did perceive some problems with Hegel's positions in the detail, he claimed to be 'very familiar' with his work and honoured his views.<sup>377</sup> It is circumstantial evidence rather than a direct link, but it is nonetheless enhances the likelihood of proximity between the two individuals.

On the grounds that we do not have a clear historical link or record, Aron wonders whether or not Clausewitz even read Hegel.<sup>378</sup> However, this lack of demonstrated historical link should not intimidate us into not searching for clues. Indeed, while direct terms, ideas and methods are borrowed from Kant word for word throughout *On War*, Clausewitz never mentions the philosopher's name, nor did he ever quote Montesquieu either. This, of course, did not stop Aron from claiming Montesquieu's influence left, right and centre, which shows that he is not applying the

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<sup>372</sup> Aron. *Penser la guerre, tome I*, p. 362

<sup>373</sup> Hoffman von Fallersleben, H. *Mein Leben* (Hannover, 1868) I, 311-312 (cited in Paret, P. Clausewitz and the State, p. 316)

<sup>374</sup> Hoffman von Fallersleben, H. *Mein Leben* (Hannover, 1868) I. 311-12 (cited by Paret, Peter. Clausewitz and the State, p. 316.)

<sup>375</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von, *Sein Leben und Werken*. Dargestellt in Briefen, Tagebüchern und Dokumenten seiner Zeit. Ed. by Rudolf Freese, Darmstadt 1986, p. 685 f and p 724 [Thanks to Andreas Herberg-Rothe for pointing this out in correspondence.]

<sup>376</sup> Clausewitz, Carl von, *Schriften, Studien, Aufsätze. Briefe*, two volumes. Göttingen 1967 and 1990. here Vol. II, 1990 p 147, 186, 229 [Thanks to Andreas Herberg-Rothe for pointing this out in correspondence.]

<sup>377</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von, *Sein Leben und Werken* (his life and activities). Dargestellt in Briefen, Tagebüchern und Dokumenten seiner Zeit. Ed. by Rudolf Freese, Darmstadt 1986, p. 724 and 685. [Thanks to Andreas Herberg-Rothe for pointing this out in correspondence.]

<sup>378</sup> Aron. *Penser la guerre, tome I*, p. 361

same academic standards to his argument in favour of one influence in his dismissal of others.

Raymond Aron's position on the Hegelian link is similar in spirit to his stance on there being no Kantian influence either, a question which we considered in Part I. Aron agrees with the overall idea that something changed dramatically in Clausewitz's writing in the late 1820s, and actually goes so far as to describe these years as a 'rupture in the evolution of [Clausewitz's] thought.'<sup>379</sup> Aron's discussion implies in fact a 'double rupture' which is on the one hand in relation to Clausewitz's late perception of the exact relation between war and politics, and secondly to properly box in absolute war into the realm of the unreal.<sup>380</sup> At the time, Clausewitz explained in editorial notes (which we shall look over below) that one of his objectives in taking on such an ambitious re-edit of his works was to centre and enhance the importance of the political nature of war elsewhere in the book, and expand on the question of the 'real' and the 'absolute'. Though Aron recognizes that 'Clausewitz 'went to great pains to reconcile these two principles [absolute and real war] into a final synthesis,'<sup>381</sup> he avoided the question of whether there was a Hegelian influence to this sudden breakthrough in the synthetic reconciliation of a dichotomy, probably since he felt that having already settled elsewhere in the book that there was no Hegelian influence, it did not strike him as useful to test his hypothesis again, in light of a different dialectic, and a different method for its resolution.

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<sup>379</sup> Aron. *Penser la guerre, tome I*, p. 355

<sup>380</sup> Michel Dobry, Clausewitz et l' "entre-deux", ou de quelques difficultés d'une recherche de paternité légitime, *Revue française de sociologie*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1976), p. 654

<sup>381</sup> Aron. *Sur Clausewitz*, (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1980), p. 103

Aron does not provide an adequate reason for the ‘rupture’. He attributes Clausewitz’ understanding of ‘politik’ exclusively to Montesquieu,<sup>382</sup> but this focus on Montesquieu does not fit the timing of the re-edit. Clausewitz had already read Montesquieu by 1805,<sup>383</sup> and had mentioned him in the early phases of writing *On War*, in the note of 1818. Would he have required nine more years to integrate this perspective into his work? It seems untenable. It is far more likely that recent discoveries and readings were impacting his thoughts, or else one would not describe the sudden changes in such a dramatic term as a ‘rupture’.

The first hint that we should draw our attention to, before embarking on the three more substantive discussions on ‘Aufhebung’, the absolute/real dichotomy, and the ‘Intelligence of the personified state’, is the undated note, which Azar Gat provides a convincing case that it was not written in 1830, as many have assumed, but rather in 1827, perhaps even slightly before the dated note of 1827.<sup>384</sup> This would place it as far more timely than the note of a decade earlier, to which Aron sticks. In this more timely note, three concepts are brought together into a single whole which carry a distinctly Hegelian message. Clausewitz writes:

*Die klaren Vorstellungen in diesen Dingen sind also nicht unnütz, außerdem hat der menschliche Geist nun einmal ganz allgemein die Richtung auf Klarheit und das Bedürfnis, überall in einem notwendigen Zusammenhang zu stehen.*<sup>385</sup>

<sup>382</sup> Aron. *Penser la guerre*, tome I, p. 173

<sup>383</sup> Paret. *Clausewitz and the State*, p. 171n

<sup>384</sup> Azar Gat. *The Origins of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 255-263 (appendix)

<sup>385</sup> Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, editorial note,  
<http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/VomKriege1832/Nachricht.htm>

Peter Paret came across the above words and was so struck by them that he decided to use a truncated version of this exact sentence as the epitaph for his book *Understanding War: Essays on Clausewitz and the History of Military Power*. He did not, however, notice that he had a strong demonstration of Hegelian thought right under his nose. Paret's translation of the original misses the mark, as does Graham's, which may explain why the passage's debt to Hegel has gone unnoticed. Graham has 'Clear ideas on these matters do, therefore, have some practical value. The human mind, moreover, has a universal thirst for clarity, and longs to feel itself part of an orderly scheme of things.' As for Paret, we find, 'Clear ideas on these matters are therefore not wholly useless; besides, the human mind has a general tendency to clearness, and always wants to be consistent with the necessary order of things.' In both cases, we miss a trio of concepts, which when brought together actually mean far more in the context of philosophy. These are: 'notwendigen Zusammenhang' which more properly translates to 'necessary connection'; 'allgemein die Richtung' which means universal direction; and 'menschliche Geist', the human spirit. The translation should therefore read:

*Clear ideas on these matters are therefore not wholly useless; the human spirit, moreover, is endowed with a universal direction to clarity, and with a need to stand at every point in a necessary connection.*

Clausewitz's appreciation for the concept of 'notwendigen Zusammenhang' shows a clear evolution, from when he first used it in an earlier chapter. In the Kritik chapter of Book II, Clausewitz wrote '[...] kein menschlicher Blick imstande ist, den

Faden des notwendigen Zusammenhanges der Dinge bis zu dem Entschluß der besiegten Fürsten zu verfolgen,<sup>386</sup> which translates to: ‘no human eye is able to follow the thread of the necessary connection of events, which led to the decisions of a defeated prince.’<sup>387</sup> Here, we find that ‘necessary connection’ is used conceptually in the way that Kant and Hume understood it: a static concept of ‘causality’ itself. The scepticism to the phrase is quite reminiscent of Hume, though in the context of this chapter, which is on the whole quite Kantian, it follows that this scepticism is the starting point, for which critical analysis provides the necessary testing to properly ground theory in historical fact.

When we move to the 1830 quote, we find that something has changed dramatically in Clausewitz’s understanding of ‘necessary connection’. Unlike Hume and Kant, Hegel’s idea of ‘necessary connection’ is not static, but is in fact the underlying logic of the universe *in which* spirit and history materialize. The Hegelian link comes from the fact that prior to his philosophical works, whether in Kant or Hume, ‘necessary connection’ was not something one could ‘stand in’, for the simple reason that ‘causality’ was construed in the Enlightenment tradition of an external phenomenon that one studies as an object. Only a Hegelian perspective allows one to ‘stand in necessary connection’, because one is the subject, the very vehicle of this necessary connection making itself objective in the world.

This transition from two versions of ‘necessary connection’ alone is a compelling demonstration of a matured understanding of Hegel. However, once we couple this one concept with the rest of the sentence, the case for a Hegelian influence becomes much harder to counter. Adding ‘human spirit’ and ‘universal direction,’ to the idea of ‘standing in necessary connection’ completes the picture. Human spirit

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<sup>386</sup> Clausewitz, Carl Von, Vom Kriege, Bk. II, Ch. 5,  
<http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/VomKriege1832/Book2Ch05VK.htm>

<sup>387</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk II, Ch. 5, p. 114

exists in the universal only insofar as it stands ‘*in*’ necessary connection; and necessary connection in Hegel is conceived precisely as this relation by which universal spirit is materialized through its particular embodiments or vehicles. As we saw in the previous chapters, for Hume there was no possibility of causal demonstration; for Kant, there was, but only in the context of the natural sciences; whereas for Hegel, ‘necessary connection’ existed in Geist. And of the three versions of the argument, this sentence by Clausewitz can only be made intelligible in the context of the third.

When considered in light of the timing and ‘rupture’ in Clausewitz’ thought, we are led to the conclusion that he had discovered something useful to him, something significant at that moment, which forced him into revision. Clearly, if Hegelian ideas are directly conjured in the note he wrote when he undertook the edit, then we should assume that the decision to edit did in fact stem from this discovery. Interestingly, Clausewitz’s mention of ‘clarity’, is telling since, at last, his lifelong struggle with the problem of the political nature of war, it’s lack of clarity, is suddenly dissipated with his this new discovery, as though there is a sudden ‘Eureka!’ moment in Clausewitz’s later life.

What Aron acknowledges as Clausewitz’s pain or difficulty may actually have stemmed from long and arduous Hegelian learning curve, considering the timing. By considering where, how and when Clausewitz used and understood the concept of ‘*Aufhebung*’, this idea of dialectical reconciliation which we discovered in the previous chapter on Hegel, it becomes possible to see that Clausewitz did in fact understand it well, and applied on more than one occasion, in a way that suggest that he was perfecting his understanding of it. In this final use of the term, it presented in



way that almost mimics how Hegel made use of it, though perhaps not with complete success.

### ‘Aufhebung’: From Discernment to Application

What is most interesting in Aron’s dismissal of the Hegelian links is that, in doing so, he established a set of criteria upon which to judge whether or not the ideas of Clausewitz had a Hegelian element, without realizing that his argument provided the seed of its own undoing. He proposed that it was unnecessary to limit himself to a historical demonstration of the lack of influence (there being no record of influence) since, through reasoning alone, he could show that the work was simply not Hegelian. Focusing in on the concept of ‘defence-attack’ found in *On War*, Aron makes mince meat of Camon’s weak argument (and as it were, Gat who repeats it<sup>388</sup>) suggesting that Clausewitz was being Hegelian here, using a thesis, attack, an antithesis, defence, and a synthesis, defence-attack. Aron justifiably explained that the term had nothing Hegelian to it, since the second term was not in any way a proper negation of the first term, and the third term did not represent a superior conceptual or historical plateau that negated the previous two and built atop them a higher level or a new triad.<sup>389</sup> He was absolutely right.

However, much like Paret, who found the right quote, but failed to fully grasp its implications, Aron brings our attention to a very important passage in *On War*, regarding defence-attack, which counters his own overall dismissal of a Hegelian influence. And again, like with Paret, we might not have considered this particular

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<sup>388</sup> Gat, *Origins*, 234-5

<sup>389</sup> Aron, *Penser la guerre, tome I*, pp. 363-4

passage in full detail had it not been used with such vigor by someone arguing the opposite stance. The passage reads:

Eine Verteidigung des Landes also wartet nur den Angriff des Landes,  
eine Verteidigung des Kriegestheaters den Angriff des Kriegestheaters,  
eine Verteidigung der Stellung den Angriff der Stellung ab. Jede  
positive und folglich mehr oder weniger angriffsartige Tätigkeit,  
welche sie nach diesem Augenblick übt, wird den Begriff der  
Verteidigung *nicht aufheben*, [my emphasis] denn das Hauptmerkmal  
derselben und ihr Hauptvorteil, das Abwarten, hat stattgefunden.<sup>390</sup>

This is translated by Howard/Paret as, ‘Once the enemy has attacked, any active and therefore more or less offensive move made by the defender does not invalidate the concept of defence, for its salient feature and chief advantage, waiting, has been established.’ The other translation by Col. J.J. Graham proposes: ‘A defence of the country, therefore, only waits for attack on the country; a defence of a theatre of war an attack on the theatre of war; and the defence of a position the attack of that position. Every positive, and consequently more or less offensive, kind of action which the defensive uses after the above period of waiting for, does not negate the idea of the continuance of the defensive; for the state of expectation, which is the chief sign of the same, and its chief advantage, has been realised.’<sup>391</sup>

Having taken the time to explain Hegel’s philosophy and the concept of ‘Aufhebung,’ in the previous chapter, it is plain to see that no translation to English is quite adequate to savour the complexities implied in the word choice. In fact, Hegel

<sup>390</sup> Clausewitz. *Vom Kriege*, Bk. VI, Ch. 8,  
<http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/VomKriege1832/Book6.htm>

<sup>391</sup> Clausewitz *On War*, Bk. VI, Ch. 8, p. 385

considered 'Aufhebung' to be a genial product of the German language, and this could explain the difficulty found in translating it to other languages.<sup>392</sup> It is a highly significant term to come across in Clausewitz, because it is 'uniquely Hegelian',<sup>393</sup> representing an idea that is both purely logical and purely historical.<sup>394</sup> The translations provided by either Graham or Howard/Paret do not pay justice to the concept by which a system of opposition sublates itself, generating a new level of knowledge which incorporates the lower level into the new. Clausewitz did not use the term 'ungültig machen' which means to 'make invalid' which would have proven the Howard/Paret version correct. Nor did he use the term 'verneinen' meaning to 'negate' as Graham has it. While there were many word options available to Clausewitz in order to make his point, he chose the specific term 'aufheben', which, if we recall, is the 'self-dissolution of extremes' as they come together, or as Hegel wrote in the *Phenomenology*:

*...abstract negation, not the negation characteristic of consciousness, which cancels in such a way that it preserves and maintains what is sublated, and thereby survives its being sublated..*<sup>395</sup>

What Aron described as the criterion he was using to demonstrate that defence-attack was not a Hegelian concept was in effect, his take on the concept of *Aufhebung*, whereby the parts of a dialectical structure are sublated, surpassed and integrated into a new conceptual plateau. In the above paragraph, Clausewitz spells out the criterion himself, by saying he does not consider this dialectical construct as

<sup>392</sup> Bernard Bourgeois, *Le vocabulaire de Hegel*, (Paris : Ellipses, 2011), p. 22

<sup>393</sup> Thomas J. J. Altizer, *Hegel and the Christian God*, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Spring, 1991), p. 72

<sup>394</sup> Idem.

<sup>395</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Mind*, Tr. Baillie, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. p. 67

having the shape required to achieve a new conceptual plateau. Here he was indeed using, as Paret argued, a simplified dialectical construct common to German Idealism, but the fact that he could identify it as such demonstrates that he could differentiate between the regular dialectics and Hegelian dialectics. Hence, he knew of *Aufhebung*, and he knew of Hegel, though he had not yet reached the point of actually experimenting further with Hegelian methodology.

What is most striking with this quick one-off reference to Hegel in Book VI is that it would have been written before Books VIII and the Book I Ch. I edits. This suggests an earlier acquaintance to the Hegelian method, albeit an incomplete one, a preliminary discernment, which had not yet evolved into its systematized application. If we consider the timing as an introduction, leading into a learning curve, then it explains in what sense a slightly later period, such as the years 1827-1830, could have corresponded with a more mature appreciation for dialectical reconciliation.

However, there is more detail to add. We know that Clausewitz was interested in the concept of ‘active defence,’<sup>396</sup> in his early years, which suggest that he would have discovered the seed of the idea of ‘defence-attack’ when studying under Scharnhorst. ‘Defensive warfare,’ he wrote in his textbook for the crown prince decades earlier, ‘therefore, does not consist of waiting idly for things to happen.’<sup>397</sup> The idea was already in his possession, but he did not develop it as dyadic relationship between offense and defence, where aspects of the former are contained in the latter. In these early writings, Clausewitz also made the case for transitioning from the defence to the offence, which is something he believed in throughout his life, ‘We must begin, therefore, using the defensive, so as to end more successfully by the

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<sup>396</sup> Clausewitz, *Principles of War*, p. 20

<sup>397</sup> Ibid. p. 54

offensive,’<sup>398</sup> yet, at this early stage, he presented it as sequence of events, or a relationship that is subsequent, rather than inherently paradoxical. Years later, when he wrote Book VI of *On War*, Clausewitz would contextualize the idea within a dialectical frame of analysis. He engaged with the notion of ‘Aufhebung’, as we saw above, and also began conceptualizing the two notions in an altogether new light, where one and the other are integrated, not separate and subsequent, as is made evident in Chapter IX, where he speaks of the defence’s ‘offensive character’ and refers to the ‘offensive elements which lie in every defensive battle.’<sup>399</sup> In this case, we can see a clear transition from Clausewitz before he engaged with dialectical reasoning, and afterwards: what he once understood as two separated ideas was thereafter reinvented as a paradoxical, dual-concept, albeit one that did not fulfill an ‘Aufhebung’.

### Real War, Absolute War, & Continuation of Policy by Other Means

Real war and absolute war were originally conceived in reference to a Kantian system of categories. However, in order for Clausewitz to begin reconciling them into the ‘continuation of policy’, he could not do so using Kantian methodology. The reconciliation depended first and foremost on building the dichotomy in such a way that it could be reconciled in the first place. And this process required a Hegelian approach. In a Kantian system, one would perceive the absolute and the real embodiments of war as being inherently and thoroughly distinct in nature, mutually exclusive, and suspended in stasis. This is not fully the case in a Hegelian dialectic,

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<sup>398</sup> Clausewitz. *Principles of War*, p. 58

<sup>399</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VI, Ch. IX, p. 400

where the stasis is broken and rendered dynamic, that is, the two poles are naturally opposed and distinct, but nonetheless contain something of the other within them, a universality, which is the root of their *Aufhebung*. Or, as Hegel explained in his exploration of sense certainty, seeing emerged from having seen and then not having seeing, a universally valid outcome that results from the sublation of the opposition.<sup>400</sup>

Clausewitz identifies two examples of such inherent elements of universality in Book VIII, chapter 3. First, he explains that ‘results’ (or ‘success in H/P translation) in war can also be understood as having an absolute form and a real form, which are perceived as either the larger goals of war or the pursuit of minor advantages.<sup>401</sup> The second is the ‘use of force’, which once again would lead to maximum use in the absolute, but is historically demonstrated to be always limited, more so at times, less so at other times. Clausewitz uses these two examples to bring forward the intrinsic (or internal) coherence [innerer Zusammenhang] which exists between the two categories of war. The term serves as the title of this section and again is a very telling word choice, which is lost in translation. Hegel was the first to try to demonstrate this concept, *innerer Zusammenhang*, as it exists in history,<sup>402</sup> that is to say, as something dynamic, not static.

If we were to use Aron’s criteria in our basis upon which to gauge the Hegelian influence, we would find that in the case of the ‘real’ and the ‘absolute’ dichotomy, and the development of its universals, leading to its complete form ‘continuation of policy’ passes the test easily. In attempting to reconcile the two, Clausewitz makes a dialectical advance where ‘what has been surpassed is also

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<sup>400</sup> Hegel. *Phenomenology of Mind*, Tr. Baillie, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. p. 34-36

<sup>401</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 3-A, pp. 646-648

<sup>402</sup> F. Engels. Review of Marx’s Critique of political Economy, Marx and Engels Collected Works, vol 16, International Publishers, New York, 1983.  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/appx2.htm>

preserved' or as Aron proposed, where the second term would negate the first, and the third term would represent a superior conceptual or historical plateau, upon which a new triad can emerge.<sup>403</sup> By arriving at the conclusion that 'war is nothing but a continuation of political intercourse, with an mixture of other means,'<sup>404</sup> Clausewitz found that in both absolute and real war, this same idea remains valid, without invalidating the notions inherent to either of the previous constructs nor those features which are inherent to both. This very contradiction and its resolution did in fact generate a new plateau: the unitary truth of war conceptualized as an 'instrument of policy' which 'neutralizes' the contradiction.<sup>405</sup>

In the first paragraph of Book VIII, Ch. 6-B, Clausewitz is not proposing an end in the philosophical exploration, but a new the beginning: it completes, or brings to a close the ontological aspects of war and its categorization, and moves the reader into a distinct realm, that of ethics, which emerges from the ontological analysis while also encompassing it: it is a *higher* realm. Indeed, while understanding war as 'absolute' or 'real' implies a mechanical understanding regarding 'how' wars are fought, the 'continuation of policy' leads us to new questions regarding 'why' wars are fought. The set of questions that emerges from passing from the 'what' to the 'why' clearly marks a new conceptual plateau upon which to embark. When we enter the realm of ethics, new contradictions can and do indeed emerge. New dialectical reconciliations are thereafter also possible. Hence, for the exact same reason that the dialectical construct of defence-attack failed to pass Aron's test; Clausewitz's 'absolute' / 'real' dichotomy rendering the idea of 'war as a continuation of policy' must pass: it represents a posited abstract idea, which is negated in the real and observed, and both of which combined are transcended in 'policy', or the 'intelligence

<sup>403</sup> Aron. *Penser la guerre, Tome I*, pp. 363-4

<sup>404</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 6-B, p 674

<sup>405</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 6-B, p. 674

of the personified state', which acts as a higher conceptual plateau where the ideal is actualized, and where the ethical realm or the moral responsibility for war resides.

In fact, if we turn now to the language Clausewitz uses to describe his synthesis of the real and the absolute, he uses the words 'mere continuation' [*bloßes Fortsetzen*], in the same that Hegel did, in his own discussion of synthetical outcomes, in the Science of Logic, in reply to Kant's "7+5=12" demonstration that mathematics are synthetical rather than analytical (which we explored previously). Hegel explained that the synthetical realm is not in the least a transition from something to something different, but that it is the 'mere continuation' [*bloßes Fortsetzen*], a certain repetition of what is already set in its nature in the first place.<sup>406</sup>

### 'Intelligence of the Personified State'

Though the reconciliation of 'real' and 'absolute' war as the 'continuation of policy by other means' did come to Clausewitz late in his life, one must not presume that this means, as some have argued,<sup>407</sup> that Clausewitz introduced the question of war's political nature in the final four years of writing *On War*. Nothing could be further from reality. From very early on, Clausewitz wrote about the *problématique* of war's relation to the political; it was not a struggle that appeared later in life.<sup>408</sup> That was not the problem. The difficulty was to find an appropriate way to formulate this underpinning into a coherent part of his theory. And this only happened much later. Having set himself the challenge of establishing a theory that did not base itself on

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<sup>406</sup> Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 791

<sup>407</sup> See for example Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz*, p. 41

<sup>408</sup> Jan Willem Honig, 'Clausewitz and the Politics of Early Modern Warfare', in Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Jan Willem Honig and Daniel Moran, eds, *Clausewitz, the State and War* (Stuttgart & New York: Franz Steiner, 2011), pp. 29–48



presuppositions, but on objective fact; he could not simply assert the political nature of war as a given; he hoped to demonstrate it by extracting his impression from observation. The question followed him throughout his life. Though part of his solution would be move away from the idea of the ‘state’ towards using instead the concept of ‘Politik’, the question remained intact: was the ‘political’ the soul of war, or did it merely give life to war?<sup>409</sup> What was the true relationship between war and politics?

In the oldest text known to have been penned by Clausewitz, at a young age, we find him writing in a broken French and making the argument that one needed to distance oneself either from the ‘principles of the art of war’ or the ‘natural interests of states’, and that given the choice, he preferred sticking with the latter, since forgoing the first would imply losing the perfection in the form, whereas forgoing the second would deprive the student of war’s ‘soul’.

*Il faut ici s'éloigner un peu ou des principes de l'art de guerre ou de l'intérêt naturel des états; et j'aime mieux le premier [orig. deleted: 'dernier'] puisque ce n'est que la perfection de la forme, qui souffre par-là, tandis qu'en s'éloignant de l'intérêt naturel des états on prive les opérations de leur âme, de cette force qui doit leur donner la vie. L'histoire confirme bien cette opinion.*<sup>410</sup>

Here, we can clearly distinguish romantic rather than idealist influences in young Clausewitz’s conception of the state as having a ‘soul’ or personal

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<sup>409</sup> Idem.

<sup>410</sup> Clausewitz. ‘Considérations sur la manière de faire la guerre à la France’ [February 1801–October 1805], cited by Jan Willem Honig. *Clausewitz and the Politics of Early Modern Warfare*, pp 1-2

unity.<sup>411</sup> However imbued with the new German intellectual currents from the start, Clausewitz's idea nonetheless surpassed its initial form as the seed grew over time, away from the 'soul' and towards something far closer to the one being developed concurrently by Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right*, where the state is understood as materialized rationality. In the final edit of Book I, or roughly in 1827, a mature Clausewitz explained that '[policy] we regard as the intelligence of the personified state.'<sup>412</sup> In this case, it is indeed essential that we stick with the Graham translation, since Howard/Paret translate the original 'Denn betrachtet man die Politik wie die Intelligenz des personifizierten Staates'<sup>413</sup> very liberally as 'If the state is thought as a person, and policy as the product of its brain.'<sup>414</sup> What is strikingly Hegelian in the formulation cannot be understood from the Howard/Paret translation, because it attempts to turn the idea into a mere bodily metaphor, whereas Clausewitz's sentence, metaphorical as well in some ways, escapes the mere analogy with the body and proposes a stand-alone concept in which the words have a far greater significance when they are taken at face value. Knowing how careful and systematic Clausewitz usually was in his word choice, it is best to translate him without the type of deviation attempted by Howard/Paret, as they add the words 'brain' and 'person' to a text where these words do not appear in the first place.

The 'intelligence of the personified state' appears in the later works of Clausewitz, not the early ones, and it corresponds closely to some of the mid to late works of Hegel as well. If we turn to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, we find that the

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<sup>411</sup> Aron. *Penser la guerre*, Tome. 2, p. 227

<sup>412</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. I, Ch. 1, p. 18

<sup>413</sup> Clausewitz. *Vom Kriege*, Bk I, Ch 1, <http://clausewitz.com/readings/VomKriege1832/Book1.htm#1>

<sup>414</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, tr. Howard/Paret, Bk. I, Ch. 1, p. 88

terms similarly constructed though not identical, where ‘policy’ and ‘intelligence’ are swapped for ‘wisdom’:

*The wisdom [Weisheit] of the government, the abstract intelligence [Verstand] of the universal will, in the fulfilling of itself. The government is itself nothing else but the self-established focus, or the individuality of the universal will. [...] it excludes all other individuals from its act, and on the other hand, it thereby constitutes itself a government that is a specific will.*<sup>415</sup>

One may be tempted to argue that since Clausewitz was of the opinion that states are the sum of various competing intelligences,<sup>416</sup> he could not share the idea that the state is the ‘individuality of the universal will’. However, this point is not inconsistent with Hegel’s position, as the paragraph quoted above goes on to discuss how the singular will rises to universality, but in effect generates ‘factions’ within the state as a result.<sup>417</sup>

Whereas young Clausewitz’s concept of state has nothing particularly Hegelian to it, his mature concept of ‘policy’ as the ‘intelligence of the personified state’ does. Knowing just how ‘central’ this topic was to Aron’s interpretation of Clausewitz, as Murielle Cozette aptly shows,<sup>418</sup> it is indeed all the more striking that he should have omitted the important Hegelian resonance. That being said, without a clear distinction between the younger and the older Clausewitz, in his analysis of it,

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<sup>415</sup> Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. Miller, p. 360 [note: I’ve used the Miller translation here because it makes the point more effectively in English than does the Baillie translation.]

<sup>416</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 2, p. 643

<sup>417</sup> Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. Miller, p. 360.

<sup>418</sup> Cozette, Muriel. *Reading Clausewitz: Raymond Aron’s Interpretation of On War, Clausewitz, The State and War*, ed. Herberg-Rothe, Honig, Moran, Staatsdiskurse – Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 2011. p. 126

Aron does not provide himself with the necessary tool to perceive the full scale reversal. Early on in Clausewitz's writing, the notion of the state is built on a metaphysical and emotional basis, this romantic idea of the 'soul'. However, the later concept is freed from emotion, anchored in pure reason, and heavily imbued with the notion of a materialized rationality: this is distinctly, stunningly Hegelian.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we considered a variety of examples that show in what ways the writings of Clausewitz evolved over time and how, in the final few years of his life, these changes were converging in very specific ways with the thoughts and ideas of Hegel. While it was not useful to the scope of this research project to pinpoint the influence, what this convergence allows us to do is read Clausewitz from a certain perspective which can illuminate aspects of his work that might otherwise not be as clear or intelligible otherwise. Understanding the similarities between Hegel and Clausewitz allows us to appreciate why certain systems of logic found in Clausewitz make sense and come together in the way that they do. This logic having been explained in the works of Hegel, and in Chapter 1 above, they help us clarify how Clausewitz's system sustains paradoxes logically.

Herberg-Rothe reminds us that Clausewitz made the point that 'theory and reality correspond to one another',<sup>419</sup> and this is indeed a significant aspect of Clausewitz's predisposition. Like Hegel, his theory is meant to bring together the real world and the world of ideas, rather than leaving them apart, and in statis. The fluidity

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<sup>419</sup> Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle*, p. 77

between how the idea of absolute war becomes materialized in varying manifestations of real war is precisely how his dialectical system shows itself to be post-Kantian to a degree. This same process of bridging the gap between the ideal and its actuality occurs again in Clausewitz's new conceptualization of the state as a personified intelligence. In both case, we are perceiving a convergence with Hegel's *what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational*, and we find ourselves positioning Clausewitz on the same side as Hegel, with regard to the latter's argument against Kant, mentioned earlier, that the abstract world of ideas is not external to the real world since it must first be 'posited' by *actual* thought.

As we move now into the next chapter, we will consider how this convergence rises in scope and gets particularly concentrated in a single place, Book I, Chapter I, the final section of *On War* written. Yet this very process of pinpointing an area in *On War* will also clarify where the links end and where a clash arises. This chapter's purpose was to widen the debate and open it up, but the next chapter will propose that we enclose the debate within set limits as well.

## Chapter 3 – Clausewitz and Hegel: The Convergence Peaks in On War's Book I, Chapter 1, as the Divergence on Ethics Sharpens

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As was mentioned earlier, what is surprising in the way Hegel and Clausewitz overlap is that even though this is increasingly apparent as we move from reading a younger to an older Clausewitz, in the end, it is at this very nexus that the two arrive at their greatest disagreement. In this chapter, in order to appreciate the extent to which there are similarities, we will look at word choices and the order in which concepts and ideas are developed in the very last sections that Clausewitz wrote and edited in *On War* relative to the works of Hegel. However, we will be forced to notice that as the resemblances become altogether uncanny, something is still missing. There is a final leap that Clausewitz does not make in his approach, and it is this that leads him to opposite conclusions on ethics. The problem is that the two authors understood the terms 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity' differently and this caused an impasse between what each concluded from what they observed. While this could be explained by the fact that Clausewitz made an informed and deliberate decision not to

follow suit, one other possibility worth noting is that he did not have the right understanding of ‘objectivity’ and ‘subjectivity’ to arrive at the same notion.

In the final section of this chapter, we will consider, as we did above with Hegel, what limits there are to Clausewitz’s ‘instrumentality’, especially at the threshold of modern technology and revolutionary warfare. The chapter will ask, how far can we take instrumentality as a justification for war before its inner-logic begins to crumble upon itself? From this point, it will be possible, in the subsequent chapter to consider both the critiques of ‘instrumentality’ and ‘right’ in parallel.

### Book I, Chapter 1 and the ‘Wondrous’ Trinity

One of the frustrations scholars might come across when they attempt to demonstrate the ‘influence’ of Hegel on Clausewitz is that if a learning curve or a crisis did occur in the late 1820s, it should be most apparent in Book I, Chapter 1 of *On War*, since it was the culmination of the new ideas that Clausewitz had in mind in revising his entire opus. For the most part, however, this does not happen – at least not on the surface. Book I, Chapter I is not constructed as a dialectical exploration. There is nothing particularly Hegelian in its form with regard to methodology. This section of *On War* is not an argumentative one, but an assertive one. It front-loads all of Clausewitz’s major conclusions, but these will not be explained and demonstrated until we read the other seven books. To perceive a convergence with the ideas of Hegel, one cannot merely look to the conclusions found in Book I, Chapter 1, because what makes them similar to Hegel is not what they posit, but how Clausewitz got there in his argument, and this only happens in Books VI and VIII.

That being said, even if the method and style of the chapter are of little help, what is significant to the argument for a convergence between the ideas of the two authors is that all four observations in the previous chapter do in fact come together, side by side in Book I, Ch. 1: the ideas of ‘inner connection’ and Spirit from the editorial note; a distancing from Montesquieu; a conception of politics as materialized reason or the personification of intelligence; the relationship between real and absolute war coming together as the continuation of politics by other means. These ideas, as we shall consider in more detail below, are all reciprocated elsewhere in the final books of *On War*. They are not conceived for the first time in Book I Chapter 1, but are in fact ideas that we come across in Books VI and VIII, which Clausewitz presents in his introduction, without fully spelling out in these early pages the logic by which he arrives at them..

There is however one important exception to this connection between the two last books, the late editorial notes, and the introduction. One idea brought forward in Book I, Ch. 1 is set there alone, and it does not reappear anywhere else in *On War*. And since it is the concluding subsection of this first chapter of *On War*, it could well be the very last thing written by Clausewitz in *On War*, before sealing the draft and heading off to what would be his last mission for the Prussian Army. In fact, the last known draft of Book 1 Chapter 1 is almost identical to the published version, but it did not contain this passage,<sup>420</sup> further evidence that this was the last addition. The passage in question is so significant to Clausewitz that he refers to it, and only it, as his ‘Consequences for Theory’, though for most readers it has become known not by this header, but for its description of war as a ‘wondrous trinity.’<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz’s Puzzle*, p. 95

<sup>421</sup> Many variations of this translation exists. Clausewitz wrote ‘wunderliche’ which in English has been referred to ‘remarkable’ and ‘paradoxical’ (Paret), wonderful (Graham), fascinating (Bassford). Cit. Christopher Bassford, *The Primacy of Policy and the ‘Trinity’ in Clausewitz’s Mature Thought*, in



The purpose of showing similarities in the concepts and constructs of Clausewitz's trinity and the work of Hegel, is again not to speak of influences, but to focus on what meaning can be drawn when we contextualize this part of *On War*, within the metaphysical debates. It will become clear that the use of a mystical term, the use of a reference to godliness in his discussion of war's nature is part of a larger frame of analysis where a holistic method is drawn in, which encapsulates and brings greater meaning to the role of 'pure reason' in its strained, but necessary relation with the blind instincts of violence. Placing a Hegelian lens to our analysis of the trinity clarifies the relationships between its three parts, which cease to appear as a subjective set of assumptions made by Clausewitz, to a more objective exploration of his topic.

Before moving into this standalone trinity, let us first take the time to show how the other four ideas come together in Book I, Ch 1, which confirms what would be expected from the last section written by Clausewitz. This forms the basis of a compromise between those who are seeking a Hegelian influence but who are disappointed by not finding the clues of it where it should be most evident, the culmination of Clausewitz's work, and those who deny the influence on this very basis. The reality is not so categorical. Hegelian methodology is not necessary in Book I Ch 1 to speak of converging ideas between the two, insofar as the other half of each of the suggestive ideas is actually developed within such a methodological framework elsewhere in *On War*.

With regard to the ideas developed in the editorial note, the very first sentence of *On War* recalls some of the language we find in it, as well as the themes that recur

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ed. Strachan, Hew & Herberg-Rothe, Andreas. Clausewitz and the Twenty-First Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 79 I have chosen to side with Herberg-Rothe on the matter and use 'wondrous'. (Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Clausewitz's "Wondrous Trinity" as a Coordinate System of War and Violent Conflict, *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, vol 3 (2), 2009, (pp. 204 – 219)

in the works of Hegel, with regard to ‘inner connections’ and relation of the whole to the particular. Like Hegel, Clausewitz has set his sight on the whole, but intends on building up to it from the simple to the complex, as a progression of interconnections. Clausewitz wrote:

We propose to consider first the single elements of our subject, then each branch or part, and, last of all, the whole, in all its relations [inneren Zusammenhange]—therefore to advance from the simple to the complex. But it is necessary for us to commence with a glance at the nature of the whole [das Wesen des Ganzen anzufangen], because it is particularly necessary that in the consideration of any of the parts the whole should be kept constantly in view.

This passage relates closely to the ideas cited in the editorial note, but more so to the two paragraphs that precede the excerpt chosen above, in which Clausewitz explains that generals, in planning war, have the hardest time in determining the proper course of action because of war’s dual concepts, which sends contradicting signals, which at times leads generals to choose actions out of merger of diverging opinions at either extreme, which wind up producing ‘a middle-course without any real value.’<sup>422</sup> His solution to this problem is, unsurprisingly, to establish ‘clear conceptions’ of these inner connections [inneren Zusammenhange],<sup>423</sup>

Only in this context can Clausewitz speak of the ‘intelligence of the personified state’, which appears in this phrase in Book I, Ch. 1., as the definition upon which to ground later discussions regarding the political nature of war.

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<sup>422</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Editorial Note, p. XXXIX

<sup>423</sup> Clausewitz *On War*, Editorial Note, p. XXXIX (note: Graham uses the words ‘inner relations’ in this particular case)

...if we regard the state policy as the intelligence of the personified state, then amongst all the constellations in the political sky which it has to compute, those must be included which arise when the nature of its relations imposes the necessity of a great war.<sup>424</sup>

If the difficulty of determining a logical course of action in war is the result of the tensions between war's real and absolute forms, leading to contradicting signals and bad decisions, it explains why Clausewitz would hope or expect that the state should be infused with the enough rationality and intelligence to comprehend the matter and 'compute' good policy in the face of great wars. His problem statement leads directly to his solution.

With regard to the tensions in war's dual concepts, again we find that Book I, Chapter 1 has integrated the later conception of the absolute and the real, which places the absolute squarely in the realm of the *totally conceptual*:

If we should seek to deduce from the pure conception of war an absolute point for the aim which we shall propose and for the means which we shall apply, this constant reciprocal action would involve us in extremes, which would be nothing but a play of ideas produced by an almost invisible train of logical subtleties. If adhering closely to the absolute, we try to avoid all difficulties by a stroke of the pen, and insist with logical strictness that in every case the extreme must be the object, and the utmost effort must be exerted in that direction,

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<sup>424</sup> Clausewitz, On War, Bk I, Ch. 1, p. 18

such a stroke of the pen would be a mere paper law, not by any means adapted to the real world.<sup>425</sup>

Moving from the simple to the complex, from the particular to the whole, as promised in the opening paragraph, Book I, Chapter 1 builds up the argument until the dual concepts of war culminates into the formula ‘war is the continuation of policy by other means’. While this might be perceived as a sufficiently holistic concept for war, because it encompasses the inner logic of war as the reciprocation of extremes and its instrumentalization in policy, Clausewitz does not end his introduction here, but having put forward ‘policy’ as a product of intelligence, he ends on war’s subjugation to ‘pure reason’ [Verstande] itself, and frames this in a most holistic fashion, ending on what appears to be an analogy that draws in the divine with his ‘wondrous trinity’. When we contextualize this idea within its dialectical methodology, the choice of words ceases to be a superficial analogy, but actually fits within a system of logic where the progression of the simple to the complex is never complete until it has encompassed the universal absolute: God. The holistic methodology can only end in the divine, and unsurprisingly for Christians like Hegel and Clausewitz, this divinity is constructed in a Trinitarian tradition. The trinity thus appears as ‘a unified, comprehensive concept from Clausewitz’s different and in part contradictory definitions, terms and formula.’<sup>426</sup>

This coming together of contradictions in the trinity is Clausewitz’s attempt at a holistic representation of war. In it, he describes war as the sum and interrelations of three sides [*Seiten*]: 1) ‘the original violence of its elements, hatred and animosity, which may be looked upon as blind instinct; 2) the play of probabilities and chance,

<sup>425</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Book I, Ch. 1, p. 5

<sup>426</sup> Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Clausewitz’s ‘Wondrous Trinity’ *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, No. 1, War and Terror (December 2007), p. 49.

which make it a free activity of the soul; 3) and the subordinate nature of a political instrument, by which it belongs purely to reason.’<sup>427</sup> Clausewitz explains that ‘The first of these three phases concerns more the people, the second, more the General and his Army; the third, more the Government.’<sup>428</sup> The third element of the trinity, Strachan argues ‘became particularly important to [Clausewitz’s] mental baggage, in that it both supplied the unifying purpose to *On War* and restrained absolute war’.<sup>429</sup> It might be more appropriate not to say ‘it became’, but rather had been latent and on Clausewitz’s mind for many years, but now Clausewitz had finally discovered the best language and method to express his idea. What is crucial in Strachan’s observation is the relationship between unifying the whole, while also containing the absolute. This represents the difficulty with holism, and the means by which both Hegel and Clausewitz attempt to resolve it is to channel the divine in their work. Indeed, if the trinity converges with Hegelian thought in such general ways, what is interesting to us is just how precisely it also does in its presentation, its ordering, and word choices, which seems to come together as a culmination of a holistic method for which Hegel has been both praised and scorned.

In his article on the trinity, Herberg-Rothe also turns to Hegel to guide his reflexions on the matter, but before doing this, he offers readers of the trinity a interesting problem to consider, when he states that ‘it is not easy to explain how Clausewitz, in his wondrous trinity, can on the one hand repeat the primacy of politics in war, while simultaneously stressing that this primacy is just one facet of three tendencies, from which every war in its own particular way and means is composed.

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<sup>427</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 19 [note: for clarity, I have removed the word ‘of’ which precedes each of the three clauses, also, the Graham translation ends on ‘... pure to the reason’, here the word ‘the’ is superfluous and perhaps even slightly misleading, since Clausewitz uses the word ‘Verstand’ which is not a specific reason, but ‘Reason’ itself.

<sup>428</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 19

<sup>429</sup> Hew Strachan, *Essay and Reflection: On Total War and Modern War*, *The International History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Jun., 2000), pp. 343.

The problem lies with how to reconcile the purposive rationality of war ('pure reason') with the first tendency – the primordial violence of war that is to be regarded as a blind natural force.<sup>430</sup>

Herberg-Rothe argues that while one might attempt to solve this problem by imposing a strict hierarchy on the trinity, this would contradict Clausewitz's picture, while the second option, to seek a solution as the opposition between the real and the absolute (Aron, Heuser, Gat) leads to the 'unpleasant consequence' of rejecting Clausewitz's 'ideal conception' of war, and, at least in the case of Aron, awarding validity exclusively to Book I, Chapter 1, at the expense of the rest of *On War*. Herberg-Rothe offers an interesting third way forward, which consists of understanding the trinity as a 'methodological starting point' which allows him to avoid contradictions,<sup>431</sup> as he pursues his objective to deduce from the trinity a 'differentiated coordinate system'<sup>432</sup>

While the system he proposes is a useful tool for understanding and applying the trinity, and his assumption that it represents a 'starting point' is a far better alternative to the two problems he describes, for which reason he proposes his third way forward, it is not without problem. What we should instead consider is not a 'fourth' way forward, but rather a single, one way backward, to the origin of the idea, which would in fact replace in the process all three approaches with a single logic that appears closer in spirit to what Clausewitz wrote, for one simple reason: the trinity was not presented by Clausewitz as a 'beginning' at all. It is the end point of his reflection, the culmination of his idea. Far from wanting it to be easily broken down

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<sup>430</sup> Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Clausewitz's 'Wondrous Trinity' *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, No. 1, War and Terror (December 2007), p. 52.

<sup>431</sup> Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Clausewitz's 'Wondrous Trinity' *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, No. 1, War and Terror (December 2007), p. 52.

<sup>432</sup> Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Clausewitz's 'Wondrous Trinity' *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, No. 1, War and Terror (December 2007), p. 67

into ‘coordinates’ and parts, or dichotomies, Clausewitz’s trinity is meant to embody the *whole*, It is unbreakable and complete.

The trouble is that Herberg-Rothe is right to look to Hegel for answers, but he does not turn to the right area of his works to uncover the key to the ‘wondrous trinity’s’ secrets. It is not enough to show that there are contradictions, or that every statement requires a counter-statement, or weights and counter-weights, which is how Herberg-Rothe introduces a similarity with Hegel.<sup>433</sup> Contradictions are indeed a feature of dialectical thinking, but they are not an end in itself; they serve a purpose forward. In the case of Hegel, what distinguishes his dialectical methods from all others is precisely this: that his system is not mere contradiction, but the overcoming of contradictions, which instead of producing various halves that are isolated and in stasis, generates a whole that is in constant flux. The trinity’s similarity with Hegel’s work is not that it has contradictions, but that it contains within itself three ‘moments’ that build themselves as a process of sublimating each preceding part, from a subjective chaos, to its objective ordering, to its self-reflection (objectivity as the result of the subjective reflecting the subjective) and integration into ‘pure reason’ in the case of Clausewitz, or Geist in the words of Hegel. To be clear, Hegel was quite adamant about the importance of splitting apart the appearance of contradictions from contradictory outcomes or ends [I am jumping ahead with this excerpt from Hegel’s Logic, but we will come back to this text later, and build up to it appropriately.] ‘It is a mistake’, Hegel explained, ‘to think that it is reason which is in contradiction with itself; it does not recognize that the contradiction is precisely the rising of reason above the limitations of understanding and the resolving of them.’<sup>434</sup> This three-way process of Hegel’s is best further developed in the Science of Logic, where each

<sup>433</sup> Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Clausewitz’s ‘Wondrous Trinity’ Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory, No. 1, War and Terror (December 2007), p.

<sup>434</sup> Hegel, The Science of Logic, p. 46

chapter builds up in this way towards the final chapter, entitled ‘The Notion’ [*Begriff*], which is whole, history reflected, God, in fact. When Clausewitz wrote his trinity using a nearly identical sequence of triadic logic he described it, perhaps unsurprisingly as ‘The Notion of War’ [*Begriff vom Krieg*] as well.<sup>435</sup>

In both Hegel and Clausewitz, their references to ‘Begriff’ encompass or bring forth the subject of divinity, because they are coming from a perspective that does not allow for a world of ideas to exist outside the real realm, as was mentioned earlier in our discussion of Gat’s work on the question. Therefore, to engage in a holistic argument, they must consider the materiality of the divine. When we study how the metaphysics influenced war studies, we are always confronted with a return to theological arguments. Interestingly, what comes to the front, as we explore Clausewitz’s divinity is that it is built up methodologically in ways that are identical to what Hegel developed in his Lectures of the Philosophy of History, given at the University of Berlin during the 1820s. The problem, however, in turning to this text to argue a link with Clausewitz is that it is not particularly convincing, for the simple reason that the book itself wasn’t published until six years after both philosophers died. That being said, these lectures were without a doubt the talk of town in Berlin’s academic circles throughout most of the 13 years that Clausewitz spent as Commander of the War College. First delivered in 1821, and then again in 1824, 1827, and 1830, Hegel’s lectures were well-attended and many copies of detailed notes taken by students were in circulation, as several of these were in fact integrated into the first publication of Hegel’s lecturing notes.<sup>436</sup> These were Hegel’s glory years: he was appointed Rector of the University of Berlin as a result of the lectures

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<sup>435</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 19

<sup>436</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, in G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995)



and was soon thereafter also decorated by the King for services rendered to the nation.<sup>437</sup>

Did Clausewitz attend the lecture in 1827? Would that explain the sudden ‘rupture’ in his thought? One can only speculate. Did Clausewitz discuss the topics with colleagues and friends? Did he come across the notes? While this remains uncertain, what we do know is that one of the students at the War Academy while Clausewitz was Commander, and a friend of Clausewitz’s according to Creusinger, Gustav von Griesheim, was given the permission to audit Hegel’s lectures happening at the University of Berlin. The student was commended by Hegel himself for the accuracy of his notes, and to this day they serve as the basis for some of the editions of these lectures.<sup>438</sup>

To be clear, the intention here is not to claim that Clausewitz read the notes or attended the event, but it is clear that had he wanted to, he would have had easy access to them. Rather, it is for the sake of clarity that it is useful to show the converging elements between Clausewitz’s work and the ideas found in the ideas in the Lectures on the Philosophy of History, because while the central tenants were written elsewhere and earlier in the works of Hegel, it is here that they are easiest to grasp. The incursion into the Philosophy of History can be taken as a heuristic tool, to help explain the method that leads Hegel to also build a trinity that consists of natural passions, war and historical events, subsumed in pure reason, in this very same order, like the structures and ideas as they appear in Clausewitz’s trinity. If indeed the origin of the converging ideas were caused by Clausewitz actually reading Hegel’s *published* rather than the unpublished notes taken by Greisheim, then one would have

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<sup>437</sup> David A. Duquette, St-Norbert College, Biography of Hegel, peer-reviewed Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/hegelsoc/>

<sup>438</sup> Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Clausewitz und Hegel. Ein heuristischer Vergleich (Clausewitz and Hegel, an heuristic comparison). In: Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preußischen Geschichte, Volume 10, 200, issue 1, pp. 49-84, here 54-58.

to turn their attention to another, earlier book, the *Science of Logic*, where many of the ideas put forward in the *Philosophy of History* in a more crisp and clear way had already been observed, albeit in a more abstract language. These passages were published years earlier in 1812. All the methodological underpinnings of the triadic moments that make up the ‘divine’, which Hegel later drew out in *Philosophy of History*, were already established in the *Science of Logic*.

That being said, before anyone should get too excited about seeing ‘threes’ everywhere, and jumping on a sudden urge to claim convergence between Hegel and Clausewitz, it is important to stress that a mere number, and a fairly commonly-used number at that, is clearly not sufficient to draw parallels. Christopher Bassford is right to point us away from the numerological interpretation that Clausewitz might have been obsessed, as others have been with the number three, in generating his trinity,<sup>439</sup> this part of *On War* is far too entwined with pure reason to find itself suddenly ingrossed with magic and superstition. That being said, when we consider the source of dialectical reasoning in the metaphysical debates of the Enlightenment, we are forced away from Bassford’s tossing aside of the mystical root to the trinity. Bassford argues that viewing the ‘trinity as evidence of mysticism’ is a fault caused by traditional, linear thought, people who have a ‘Newtonian world view, who are baffled by Clausewitz’s obsession with chance, unpredictability, and disproportionality in the cause-effect relationship’.<sup>440</sup> Contextualizing the trinity in relation to similar methods found in Hegel suggests rather that the mystical is central, not because it is magical, but quite the opposite, because rationality is itself the

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<sup>439</sup> Christopher Bassford, *The Primacy of Policy and the ‘Triity’ in Clausewitz’s Mature Thought*, in Strachan, Hew & Herberg-Rothe, Andreas, ed. *Clausewitz and the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 79

<sup>440</sup> Christopher Bassford, *The Primacy of Policy and the ‘Triity’ in Clausewitz’s Mature Thought*, in Strachan, Hew & Herberg-Rothe, Andreas, ed. *Clausewitz and the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 79

mystical or spiritual realm. The reference to the mystical realm of the trinity is a means to anchor the trinity into a holistic philosophical system, where pure reason gives meaning and vitality to events in history such as war, and attempts to direct it and guide it, but is ultimately only confronted with its building blocks which are passions that may offer pull back and resistance to this very rationality pushing forward. As Bassford explains, the trinity in Clausewitz can be described, in more abstract terms, as a triad representing ‘irrationality/non-rationality/rationality,’ for which it is important to note that the final term ‘bloßen Verstande’ must be understood as ‘pure reason’ and not, as Howard & Paret wrote, ‘only reason,’<sup>441</sup> this loses entirely its philosophical connotation in the German philosophical tradition. It might be even truer to the spirit of German thought to use the word ‘intelligence’ itself as the closest approximation of the word ‘Verstande’, which is the choice made by A.V. Miller in his well-received translations of Hegel.

The fact that the trinity is presented directly after, and in counterpose to the description of war as a ‘chameleon’ is important because it allows Clausewitz to spell out first the fact that wars seem highly adaptable and constantly changing, but in fact, these changes are superficial, mere skin color changes, but in reality, the core itself is unchanging. Clausewitz’s trinity is the complete opposite of this: it represents a universal and absolute configuration for the nature of war that allows for continual fluctuations within a system that is itself unchanging. The chameleon is a manifestation of variable forms, but the trinity is the true essence and its underlying material form. It is ‘all-inclusive and universal’<sup>442</sup>, containing within it all the shades

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<sup>441</sup> Christopher Bassford, *The Primacy of Policy and the ‘Triity’ in Clausewitz’s Mature Thought*, in Strachan, Hew & Herberg-Rothe, Andreas, ed. *Clausewitz and the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 80

<sup>442</sup> Christopher Bassford, *The Primacy of Policy and the ‘Triity’ in Clausewitz’s Mature Thought*, in Strachan, Hew & Herberg-Rothe, Andreas, ed. *Clausewitz and the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 90

and colours which the chameleon has taken before, can take today, and might take tomorrow.

It is important to recall that the study of God in the post-Kantian context, and in particular in Hegel sets itself on a completely different plane of analysis than what was found among the earlier empiricists and theologians who sought out demonstration in deducing the divine, the Causa Prima, from the observation of God's effect in the world. In his introduction to the Philosophy of History, Hegel presents the divine as a God who 'governs the world, [where] the actual working of his government – the carrying out of his plan – is the History of the World.'<sup>443</sup> In the same way, Clausewitz's deity is also expressed as the 'giving laws' governing when describes the trinity, 'these three tendencies, which appear like so many different lawgivers'.<sup>444</sup> For Hegel, God is described in these words: 'This essential being is the union of the subjective with the rational Will: it is the moral Whole, the State, which is that form of reality in which the individual has and enjoys his freedom; but on the condition of his recognizing, believing in, and willing that which is common to the Whole.'<sup>445</sup> Hegel's God is understood as progression of the universe from from *irrationality, to non-rationality, to rationality*, as a historical process consisting of the following three moments:

- 1) The abstract characteristics of the nature of Spirit
- 2) What means Spirit uses in order to realize its Idea
- 3) Lastly, we must consider the shape which the perfect embodiment of Spirit assumes<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Hegel, Philosophy of History, p. 36

<sup>444</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 19

<sup>445</sup> Hegel, Philosophy of History, p. 38

<sup>446</sup> Hegel, Philosophy of History, p. 17

We can right away identify a preliminary similarity between this and Clausewitz's trinity, since the latter also integrates first what is latent, to how it is utilized, to how it is integrated and subsumed in pure reason or Spirit. However, we must go deeper into each of the three parts in order to uncover the extent to which the above three are parallel to Clausewitz's trinity not only as a whole, but also, in each individual part. Hegel understood the passions of man as the means through which reason actualizes itself in history,<sup>447</sup> and indeed, this forms the first of the three moments, 'abstract characteristics':

The state of nature is therefore, predominantly that of injustice and violence, of untamed natural impulses [Naturtrieb], of inhuman deeds and feelings. Limitation is certainly produced by society and the state, but it is a limitation of the mere brute emotions and rude instincts; as also in a more advanced stage of culture, of the premeditated self-will of caprice and passion. This kind of constraint is part of the instrumentality by which only, the consciousness of Freedom and the desire for its attainment, in its true – that is rational and ideal form – can be obtained.<sup>448</sup>

When Clausewitz described the first 'side' in his own trinity, he also used the term 'Naturtrieb' and spoke of this aspect of war as composed of blind passions and violence.<sup>449</sup> There is something animal and inhuman to both the first moments of the

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<sup>447</sup> Schlomo Avineri, *The Instrumentality of Passion in the World of Reason: Hegel and Marx: Political Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Nov., 1973), p. 390

<sup>448</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, pp. 40-41

<sup>449</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Bk I, Ch 1, p. 19

triads described in Hegel and Clausewitz divinities, but ultimately, this animal behavior will fall prey to reason [*bloßen Verstande anheimfällt*]<sup>450</sup>, and in fact gets ‘instrumentalized’ in the process, writes Hegel, above. The same finality is at the heart of Clausewitz’s trinity, but beyond this end, the means to achieving it also converge.

Before reaching their third moment, in which reason instrumentalizes these passions, both Clausewitz and Hegel present war itself and its generals as the objectification or ordering mechanism that emerges from the chaos of passions. Whereas Clausewitz’s second moment is presented as the place of armies and generals in the equation, Hegel’s second moment is the section of the Philosophy of History in which he describes the role played by ‘world-historical people’ such as Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon.<sup>451</sup> Their roles are presented as a disciplining of passions, the means by which Spirit uses in attaining its aims, ‘Passion,’ Hegel writes, ‘is regarded as a thing of sinister aspect, as more or less immoral. Man is required to have no passions.’<sup>452</sup> By negating passions and structuring violence teologically, it becomes possible to imagine how pure reason could in fact instrumentalize it. For it would be impossible for reason to impose itself simply on the chaos of passions, these passions must be structured before reason can make anything of them. The third moment could not possibly exist in either Hegel or Clausewitz’s trinities were it not for this second moment that renders passions ‘manageable’ in the first place. But there could be no managing of violence if it were not for its ‘latent’<sup>453</sup> existence which is the first moment. The three moments are indeed inseparable. This process of

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<sup>450</sup> Clausewitz, On War, Bk I, Ch 1, p. 19

<sup>451</sup> Hegel, Philosophy of History, p.31

<sup>452</sup> Hegel, Philosophy of History, p. 23

<sup>453</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 19

instrumentalization is what Hegel refers to the ‘cunning of reason,’<sup>454</sup> because it seems counterintuitive that events that appear irrational, like war and blind passionate violence, could be contributing to manifesting reason to the world. What Hegel meant by this is that ‘history fulfils its ulterior rational designs in an indirect and sly manor. It does so by calling into play the irrational element in human nature, the passions.’<sup>455</sup>

Thanks to presence of the term ‘cunning of reason’ in the Philosophy of History we can clearly recognize its direct reference to the Science of Logic<sup>456</sup>, in which Hegel uses the term in his chapter on Teleology, which has as its purpose to determine whether or not ‘absolute determines itself in accordance with ends.’<sup>457</sup> In the first phrase of the chapter, Hegel explains that ‘where purposiveness is discerned, an intelligence [Verstand] is assumed as its author, and for the end we therefore demand the Notion’s own free Existence’.<sup>458</sup> In Clausewitz, this freedom of spirit theme also appears, when in the second moment of his trinity, he describes war as the ‘free activity of the soul’.<sup>459</sup>

If the Philosophy of History provides us with a less conceptual, and easier to grasp similarities with Clausewitz’s trinity, it remains essential for us to return to the Science of Logic to appreciate the way Book I, Chapter 1 does in fact take on a Hegelian form, not generally, but near the end when it leads into the final section ‘Consequences for Theory.’ Interestingly, the final segment right before Hegel reaches his own trinity has yet another particularity that may surprise readers of Clausewitz who are familiar with his famous quote with regard to war’s grammar and logic, which, though it does not appear directly in Book I, Ch 1, nonetheless does so

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<sup>454</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 33

<sup>455</sup> Robert C. Tucker, *The Cunning of Reason in Hegel and Marx*, *The Review of Politics* Vol. 18, No. 3 (Jul., 1956), p. 269

<sup>456</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 734

<sup>457</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 746; and *The Philosophy of History*, p. 33

<sup>458</sup> Hegel *Science of Logic*, p. 734

<sup>459</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 19

in an indirect manner, at very same place, in fact. Before Clausewitz jumps into his trinity, his last order of business in the introduction is to define war as the continuation of policy. The chapter in *On War* that deals with this particular subject, ‘War is an Instrument of Policy’ (Book VIII, Chapter 6-B), is where Clausewitz brings up the topic of logic and grammar. He wrote:

Is not war merely another kind of writing and language for political thoughts? It has certainly a grammar of its own, but its logic is not peculiar to itself. Accordingly, war can never be separated from political intercourse, and if, in the consideration of the matter, this is done in any way, all the threads of the different relations are, to a certain extent, broken, and we have before us a senseless thing without an object.<sup>460</sup>

By ‘logic,’ Clausewitz meant the ‘set of rules that govern reasoning [...] likened to the accepted set of imperatives, principles, or customs governing political intercourse, all of which shape the conceptual limits of strategy.’<sup>461</sup> As for the ‘grammar’, which are rules regarding oral and written communications, Echevarria explains that these should be understood as the ‘military principles, rules, or procedures that govern the use of armed force.’<sup>462</sup>

The final two pages of the introduction to the *Science of Logic*, before breaking off into a final sub-header in which he introduced *Begriff* as a trinity, Hegel

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<sup>460</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Book VIII, Ch. 6-B

<sup>461</sup> Antulio Echevarria. *Reconsidering War's Logic and Grammar*, *Infinity Journal*, Issue 2, Spring 2011. (reproduced on [www.clausewitz.com](http://www.clausewitz.com))

<sup>462</sup> Antulio Echevarria. *Reconsidering War's Logic and Grammar*, *Infinity Journal*, Issue 2, Spring 2011. (reproduced on [www.clausewitz.com](http://www.clausewitz.com))



differentiated between ‘logic’ and ‘grammar’ and settled their relationship to one another as follows:

‘He who begins with the study of grammar finds in its form an isolated collection of definitions and terms which exhibit only the value and significance of what is implied in their immediate meaning; there is nothing to be known in them other than themselves. [...] Through the grammar, he can recognize the expression of mind [Geist] as such, that is, logic. [...] The first acquaintance with logic confines its significance to itself alone; its content passes only for a detached occupation with the determinations of thought, *alongside* which other scientific activities possess on their own account a matter and content of their own, on which logic may have a formal influence, though an influence which comes only from itself and which if necessary can of course also be dispensed with so far as the scientific structure and its study are concerned.’<sup>463</sup>

More significantly, though, as we read on, we uncover in the introduction to the Science of Logic that Hegel also builds his argument up to similar ends. In the final subsection of the introduction, right after having discussed the grammar and logic, but before developing the triadic Notion, he brings in the divine into the equation, which is then developed in its detail in the upcoming section entitled the ‘General Division of Logic’. Hegel arrives at the same ultimate result as Clausewitz, dividing his ‘Notion’ into three interconnected, syllogical moments, but not without

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<sup>463</sup> Hegel, The Science of Logic, p. 57-58

first by contextualizing this trinity in divine terminology, ‘The soul, the world, and God,’<sup>464</sup> which he then breaks down into three moments of development

- 1) The logic of being
- 2) The logic of essence, and
- 3) The logic of the Notion<sup>465</sup>

The three for a forward relationship from the latent and subjective, through its objective realization, and finally incorporated and self-reflected as pure reason. As Duquette explains,

‘...into three parts: the subjective notion, the objective notion, and the idea which articulates the unity of subjective and objective’. The first part, the subjective notion, contains three “moments” or functional parts: universality, particularity, and individuality (§ 163ff). These are particularly important as Hegel will show how the functional parts of the state operate according to a progressive “dialectical” movement from the first to the third moments and how the state as a whole, as a functioning and integrated totality, gives expression to the concept of individuality (in §198 Hegel refers to the state as “a system of three syllogisms”). Hegel treats these relationships as logical judgments and syllogisms but they do not merely articulate how the mind must operate (subjectivity) but also explain actual relationships in reality (objectivity).’<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 63

<sup>465</sup> Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 64

<sup>466</sup> Duquette, David A. *Biography of Hegel*, peer-reviewed Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/hegelsoc/>, St-Norbert College, (viewed August 19, 2013)

Clausewitz's trinity is precisely this, a system of three syllogisms, which is to say, three distinct conclusions or inferences, built into internal contradictions or oppositions, which exist in parallel and reinforce one another or build upon one another. In this context, the state as an individual actor can indeed be 'personified', but more importantly, it achieves this end only because it is 'animated by Spirit'<sup>467</sup> in the first place. What's important, however is that such a system of syllogisms is necessarily a relational thing, rather than a set of three fix items floating independently from one another. As Hegel explains:

According to the relation by which the subjective end is united with objectivity, both premises alike – the relation of the object determined as means to the still external object, and the relation of the subjective end to the object which is made means – are immediate relations.<sup>468</sup>

Both Hegel and Clausewitz perceive their trinities as relational rather than as standalone ideas. Clausewitz refers to this twice in his discussion of the trinity, as he introduces it, writing that war, 'in relation to the predominant tendencies which are in it, a wonderful trinity,' which is followed up later, in the concluding remarks, 'any arbitrary relation between them, would immediately become involved in such a contradiction with the reality, that it might be regarded as destroyed at once by that alone.'<sup>469</sup>

These relations between the three moments clarify the process of instrumentalization for which the 'Teleology' chapter in the Science of Logic is the

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<sup>467</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 50

<sup>468</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 749

<sup>469</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 19

core argument, where Hegel understands teleology as the very process by which ‘we make our ascent to the Absolute Idea,’<sup>470</sup> which is in effect the end goal of the book, it is the whole, it is the Soul of the world. If the first moment, as we saw, represented what nature has dealt us, subjectively, and the second, how this was negated into objectivity through its instrumentalization, the third moment, in which pure reason is self-reflected in the process is also in itself the neutralization of the instrument, the fact that the instrument cannot exist alone:

‘The means has no power of resistance against the end, as it has in the first instance against another immediate object [...] it is a neutral and also as a different object, no longer self-subsistent. Its lack of self-subsistence consists precisely in its being only *in itself* the totality of the Notion, but the latter is a being-for-itself. Consequently the object has the character of being powerless against the end and of serving it; the end is the object’s subjectivity or soul, that has in the object its external side.

‘The object, being in this manner *immediately* subjected to the end, is not an extreme of the syllogism; but this relation constitutes one of its premises. But the means has also a side from which it still has self-subsistence as against the end. The objectivity that is connected with the end in the means is still external to it, because it is only immediately so connected; and therefore the *presupposition* still persists. The activity of the end through the means is for that reason

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<sup>470</sup> J. N. Findlay, *Hegel Today*, Vol. 48, No. 1, (January, 1964), p. 8

still directed against this presupposition, and the end is activity and no longer merely an urge and a striving, precisely because the moment of objectivity is posited in the means in its determinateness as something external, and the simple unity [Einheit] of the Notion now has this objectivity *as such* in itself.<sup>471</sup>

The two paragraphs are the final parts of Hegel's second moment in the Teleology chapter, the instrument itself, which exists at the middle ground between the blind passions of the first moment, and the pure reason of the third. In Clausewitz, this is the instrumental part of his trinity as well, the play of chances and the roles of generals and armies. When we consider that at the end of his Teleology chapter, Hegel arrives almost exactly at the same conclusion as Clausewitz, who wrote in the Trinity that war was the 'subordinate',<sup>472</sup> but more strikingly, in his discussion of 'War as an Instrument of Policy' (Book VII, Ch 6-B), reaffirms that this 'unity' [Einheit] or the reconciliation of 'absolute' and 'real' war as lacking independence and being subdued despite its power:

'This unity [Einheit] is the conception that war is only a part of political intercourse, therefore by no means an independent thing in itself [...] policy makes out of the all-overpowering element of war a mere instrument.'<sup>473</sup>

Finding such overlap between concepts in the Teleology and On War is highly significant because 'The teleology of Hegel's thought differentiates him from all the

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<sup>471</sup> Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 745

<sup>472</sup> Clausewitz, On War, Bk I, Ch 1, p. 19

<sup>473</sup> Clausewitz, On War, Bk VIII, Ch 6-B, p. 674

philosophers.<sup>474</sup> What this suggests in our study of Hegel and Clausewitz, is that the only way for Clausewitz to have achieved similar thinking is to have come up with it himself, because he would not have found this anywhere else in philosophical literature. Either Clausewitz was directly influenced by Hegel, or else he was developing on his own, highly similar pattern of thinking. Either way, the logical constructs, when we understand them in this light, provide us with a more complete understanding not only of their meaning, but in what sense they are internally coherent, because they imply a process of ‘Aufhebung’ *that leads from the irrational to the rational*, which is in fact the experience of pure reason manifested.

Though the trinity in Clausewitz is presented in the introduction, it should not be understood as the ‘beginning’ of his theory, but rather its ‘end’ point. It is the culmination of the holistic ‘concept’ [Begriff]. Herberg-Rothe is absolutely right to refer to it as Clausewitz’s ‘real legacy’, though one might question his insistence (in the same paragraph) on the fact that Clausewitz’s use of the word ‘first’<sup>475</sup> should be understood as representing a premise or beginning to the book. This is too categorical. Though it appears in the introduction, it is presented its culmination, a holistic conclusion, which sheds light for understanding the beginning, but to which the whole of the work will attempt to return to or achieve. The divine is both the end and the beginning. Is Clausewitz’s word choice the ‘first ray of light’ not a clear show of this?<sup>476</sup> The first commands spoken by God in bible: God’s very first act of creation: ‘Fiat Lux!’ If we understand the trinity in its convergence with a Hegelian approach, we can understand it from a holistic perspective which arrives at the conclusion which is the divine, but only insofar as the conceptual premise of this divine is built into the Aufhebung of the progressif moments in a teleological trinity.

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<sup>474</sup> J. N. Findlay, Hegel Today The Monist, Vol. 48, No. 1, (January, 1964), p. 1

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<sup>476</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 19

Why does this matter in the end? The immediate reason is that this approach to understanding the trinity relativizes it. From this perspective, we can escape the interpretation of the trinity in its ‘secondary form’, where the actors suggested in the trinity are split away: the people, the army, the government. This alternative trinity is fix and rigid, and allows very limited space for conceptualizing war on the ‘whole’ and in its various ‘skin colours’. Clausewitz mentioned these three actors as examples, but did not suggest that they were the exclusive embodiments of the relationships in the trinity, he described the trinity as being ‘mainly’<sup>477</sup> embodied by them, but not absolutely. Pulling them out and proclaiming the three as the trinity itself is a gross error, because it defines and imposes a model for what war is, and what is external to it suddenly becomes difficult to understand, and can easily lead to questionable claims regarding the fact that multilateral forces and non-state actors render Clausewitzian thought somehow less applicable or altogether inapplicable.

By presenting the trinity as the culmination of a holistic methodology, as was done above, we can transition from a discussion that would attempt unconvincing refutations of this ‘whole’ based on poking holes here and there, but without ever engaging in a way that properly encroaches on or dismantles the edifice. As we move into the final pages of this thesis, the argument will take a different shape altogether, in that we will consider what limits are inherent to this whole, which in effect will legitimize certain ethical features of both the Hegelian and the Clausewitzian theories of war, but will also in the process strip them of the absoluteness and their universality... in effect limiting the *divine aura* of their trinities and the distinct concepts of ‘Good’ that emerge from worshipping one or the other.

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<sup>477</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 19

While there is a clear methodological convergence in the two trinities, what distinguishes most is the interplay between Hegel emphasizing it as the relationship between the subjective world, the process of making objective as a process, and then reflecting this objectivity back onto itself as finality. This finality or ‘holism’ is alluded to in Book I Chapter 1, particular in the very first paragraph, as we saw above, and the final paragraphs that make up his reference to the divine and the trinity. This however, appears partially incomplete, since it presents war through the same lens, first, the subjective end is the blind natural instincts, second, the objective means is war’s mechanisms and deployment, and third, the finality is how these are absorbed cunningly within Reason. Clausewitz is in effect presenting us with subjective and objective concepts, but not referring to them as such. In the end, however, unlike Hegel, he does not claim that the third moment in fact succeeds in encompassing the two others, or that war achieves an objective end. He builds up to this argument, but stops short near the very end. The *Aufhebung* of war’s political element is not the other two moments of the trinity, but rather its relationship to the real and the absolute concepts of war. When he places this conclusion in the trinity, unlike he Hegel, he does not place this ‘pure reason’ as resolving the other two. The linearity functions one way, from the subjective to the objective to the final end, but it is not self-reflected, ‘pure reason’ is not given reign over the other two parts of the trinity, even if it instrumentalizes them. Clausewitz is apparently suggesting that this instrumentalization is imperfect, which is why the three co-exist.

This can mean one of two things. Either Clausewitz had all the methodological tools needed to reach that end, but he chose not to, or else he did not have the necessary understanding of the relationship between the concepts of ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’ to reach the same conclusion as Hegel. Either possibility is tenable. If it



was a deliberate choice to part from Hegel, it might have been for the simple reason that being more experienced and perhaps also less naïve about war, he understood that the passions and the machinery of war could in fact undermine its rational ends. His development of the wondrous trinity as being more of a floating triad than a linear one, allows Clausewitz to showcase the fact that ‘a complete reduction of war to an instrument of policy would be a contradiction.’<sup>478</sup> In Hegel theory of teleology, this is not the case, the instrumentality is so unquestioned that sets the very basis upon which to edify war as a right ‘right’. Were it not for this, perfect instrumentality, then such a right could not emerge, since there is no such thing as an ‘imperfect’ right. It is an absolute concept. That being said, Clausewitz’s more careful take on instrumentality does not require that we go so far as to claim, as Herberg-Rothe does, that the three tendencies are of ‘equal importance’<sup>479</sup>. Clausewitz does not make that claim, nor is it implicit. Clausewitz imperfect instrumentality nonetheless starts with primordial violence and ends with pure reason, which is the order in which he placed these items, the linear relation between the three nonetheless exists by virtue of the fact that pure reason is meant to preside the other two, albeit, only to the best of its ability, since the other two continually undermine its ability to control them and instrumentalize them, in the Hegelian sense. There is a distinction between the two, but it is not so clearcut. It is possible that Clausewitz refused to take a leap of faith, and stopped one short of Hegel for this reason, as a way to be more realistic about instrumentality. Alternatively, it is possible that Clausewitz simply did not possess the necessary knowledge of Hegel in order to extract the same conclusion. Since we cannot infer with regard to the first, let us explore the latter, and once that has been done, it will be up to the reader to choose which of the two is more likely. Either way,

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<sup>478</sup> Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz’s Puzzle*, p. 115

<sup>479</sup> Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz’s Puzzle*, p. 116

it is at this threshold that the convergence between Hegel and Clausewitz come to an end, and the ethical divergence appears.

### Subjectivity & Objectivity: Source of an Ethical Divergence?

The problem, however, with making use of a holistic method, very similar to Hegel's, in an ad hoc, here and there fashion, but not systematically, is that it cannot work in the same way that it was possible in the case of Clausewitz integrating concepts from Kant and Montesquieu. While one might get away with using concepts haphazardly and according to their immediate utility with some authors, the use of Hegelian concepts in such a manner becomes far more problematic, because the Hegelian 'system' is exactly that, a system. It does not stand alone in its parts. And trying to apply the whole to particular items, or vice versa, in the way Clausewitz was attempting could very likely lead to the kind of crisis that he experienced in the late 1820s, it is a serious and difficult conundrum. As we saw in Chapter 1, the premise of understanding the most basic form of Hegelian thought, 'sense-certainty' are in some ways preordained by the possibility of there being an overarching 'Geist'. The system does not have gaps, it is a continuum. It may be useful, as Taylor and Frost have argued,<sup>480</sup> to focus in on the mid section that lies between the grand cosmic scale and the minute perceptual scale, but only insofar as we do not forget where this midsection is coming from in the first place.

From the moment Clausewitz applied Hegelian ideas as mere ad hoc tools of analysis, he began generating the root of a contradiction between the two dialecticians: a distinct and incompatible understanding of 'objectivity' and

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<sup>480</sup> See Frost, *For a Normative Theory of International Relations*, p. 168. Also, Taylor argues, in *Hegel*, that even though the central spiritual and ontological thesis is dead, but that Hegel remains relevant nonetheless, p. 538-539

‘subjectivity’, which in some ways betrays Clausewitz’s slightly more modest understanding of philosophy in general. Objectivity and subjectivity are a long standing conundrum of philosophy. For subjectivity to exist, it must result from the existence of consciousness, or there being a subject in the first place. If consciousness alone exists in relation to unconscious objects, then all thoughts would necessarily be subjective, thereby condemning all thought to exist outside objectivity. Without objectivity, there could be no truth.

So central was the question of subjectivity and objectivity to the purpose of his system, that Hegel decided to make it his first order of business, in the introduction to the *Phenomenology*. This is the discussion, which was briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, where Hegel is describing the problem of whether systematizing our knowledge of the world means seeing it through a medium, or shaping it with an instrument. In either case, the truth is devoid of objectivity, it is dependent on some external factor. Hegel writes:

For if knowledge is the instrument by which to get possession of absolute Reality, the suggestion immediately occurs that the application of an instrument to anything does *not* leave it as it is for itself, but rather entails in the process, and has in view, a moulding and alteration of it. Or, again, if knowledge is not an instrument which we actively employ, but a kind of passive medium through which the light of the truth reaches us, then here, too, we do not receive it as it is in itself, but as it is through and in this medium. In either case we employ

a means which immediately brings about the very opposite of its own end; or, rather, the absurdity lies in making use of any means at all.<sup>481</sup>

Hegel's solution to this impasse is his method in itself. His dialectical system is not an instrument meant to break down the world into various dichotomies and the rebuild it in parts until it forms the whole. Nor is it a medium, through which we see an otherwise non-dialectical world appear to us in a way it is not in itself. Typically Hegelian, this dichotomy is transcended and negated in way that keeps the initial truth of either case within its sublation. Hegelian dialectics are both an instrument and a medium, and more importantly, neither. It is an instrument in that we use it to see the world, but we do not need to rebuild the world using it since the world is already built in this way. And equally, the dialectic is not a medium since we are stepping back and letting the world appear to us as it is, in itself, but not from an external, passive perspective; we are part of this world. Consequently, Hegel finds objectivity by integrating both forms of subjectivity and thereby transcending the divide. This is achieved as a process: objectivity is not posited in itself, but is the result of subjectivity recognizing and negating its own subjectivity. Objectivity is not a 'positive', but rather a double negative. Thus, Hegel explains the possibility of a unity between objectivity and subjectivity:

The development of spirit was indicated in the preceding movement of mind, where the object of consciousness, the category pure and simple, rose to the notion of reason. When reason observes this pure unity of ego and existence, the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, of for-

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<sup>481</sup> Hegel. *Phenomenology of Mind*, Tr. J. Baillie 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p. 28.

itself-ness and in-itself-ness – this unity is immanent, has the character of implicitness or of being ; and consciousness of reason finds itself.<sup>482</sup>

If Clausewitz learned a few tricks from Hegel regarding how to reconcile oppositions, he did not integrate any of Hegel's ideas into how he understood the words 'objective' and 'subjective'. To Clausewitz, the terms are used in their laymen significance, or as we might say in a sentence, 'subjectively speaking...' or 'objectively speaking...', which is more adequately understood as meaning 'arbitrary' or 'not arbitrary'. Even in his final edits of Book I, chapter 1, there is no sign of this concept having been elevated in any way. For example, he will use the terms in discussing how war's objective nature is that it is a calculation of probabilities, and that its subjective nature is that it is played out like a game [Spiel] (H/P translation 'gamble').<sup>483</sup> Elsewhere, in Book II, Chapter 2, Clausewitz refers to the 'objective form of knowledge' which he opposes to the 'subjective [...] skill in action'. His use of these terms is therefore quite distinct from how Hegel understands them. In the Hegelian system, one cannot split action and knowledge in this way, since actions are conscious and knowledge is posited in the material world. This split is precisely at the cusp of the original argument that pushed Hegel to reply to Kant in the first place. Furthermore, knowledge is not considered objective in itself, but objective only insofar as it has come to terms with its subjectivity. In Hegel, one could not split up action from knowledge, nor subjectivity from objectivity, and therefore even less split up the former by integrating the latter to it, as Clausewitz did. For Hegel, Geist is precisely this process of reconciling the ideal to the real, knowledge and action combined as subjectivity making itself objective in the world.

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<sup>482</sup> Phenomenology of Mind, tr. Baillie 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Blackmask, 2001. p. 155

<sup>483</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Bk. I, Ch. 1, p. 14

Where the divergence becomes most apparent and also has the most impact is the way in which Clausewitz applies dialectical reconciliation to the real/absolute dichotomy. Though we recognized above that it was Hegelian in its form, we must now analyze in what way it was nonetheless an imperfect attempt at a Hegelian reconciliation, because it was tainted by the problem of subjectivity/objectivity as it is described in the first pages of the *Phenomenology*. That the authors were not using the terms in the same way explains how this problem might surface in the first place. But perhaps more importantly, it stems from the fact that Clausewitz had an idea since his youth, regarding the role of politics and war, but his solution came to him slowly, and in increments, in the shape of a Hegelian learning curve. As such, in the end, he had found an instrument with which he could fix his problem, thus did he fall squarely into the trap described by Hegel: *moulding, altering* the object.

To compare, Clausewitz's reconciliation of the absolute and real incarnations of war does not achieve the *hands off* objectivity that is made evident in Hegel's discussion of sense-certainty. The actions of 'seeing a tree' or 'not seeing a tree' are thoroughly mutually exclusive, though either one recalls the other's absence in being posited. When we reach the universal of 'sight' as a new conceptual plateau, we do not have to seek out the items within the two first phases which would justify the third, or bring out similarities within them which could be aspects of the transcendence. The universal emerges in and of itself; its objectivity becomes intuitively self-evident as a result of the *Aufhebung*.

Clausewitz's reconciliation attempts to *churn out* the same model by roughly copying the Hegelian system, but as a result, it does not fully succeed. His conclusion does not emerge to the reader as self-evident as was the case with Hegel's sense-certainty. The various parts of the argument are teased out, tooled in the process.

While the mimicry serves as a powerful suggestion of a Hegelian influence, it nonetheless also shows a failure to understand Hegel properly as well. By *applying* Hegel in this way, Clausewitz was introducing subjectivity into his theorization by Hegelian standards. The contradiction between the real and the absolute nature of war do not inherently spell out the ‘continuation of policy’; this requires modelling both types of war, in order to bring out not the completeness of their contradiction, but rather aspects of their coming together. While Hegel’s discussion of negation made the unifying universal self-evident, in the case of sight and seeing, Clausewitz starts by teasing out the similarities, before proclaiming a transcendental conclusion. Hence, the conclusion, regardless of how compelling and practical it is, does not emerge entirely objectively.

We could view this to be a failure on the part of Clausewitz, but it would be more adequate to present it rather as an outcome of his pragmatic style. The reconciliation which he proposes was not completely objective, but it nonetheless generated a useful idea for governments when conceptualizing war and making war plans. Furthermore, it provides not simply a self-contained ethic in itself, but a moralistic ethic that imposes responsibility specifically on those in government. By stating that war is subordinated to an outside power, it finds war’s ethical essence in its material source, rather than some external or mystical justification. So while Hegel’s objectivity generates what one might call spiritual rights for the state, Clausewitz’s subjectivity generates an antipodal and material moral responsibility at the state level, thereby serving a purpose, despite not being objective by Hegelian standards. Reciprocally, Hegel’s objective notion of war would not have been ethically pragmatic, by Clausewitzian standards.

An interesting anecdote which illustrates perfectly the ethical breakdown between Clausewitz and Hegel is their opposite reactions to the defeat at Jena-Auerstedt. Unlike Clausewitz, who was captured and imprisoned in the aftermath of the battle, and whose hatred for Napoleon culminated then; Hegel, who was teaching in Jena when the battle took place, saw the event in a much different light, describing Napoleon in a far more sympathetic light, if not a halo:

I saw the Emperor – this world-soul [diese Weltseele] – riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it. As for the fate of the Prussians, in truth no better prognosis could be given.<sup>484</sup>

Hegel saw in Napoleon the incarnation of the politico-economic reforms required for modernity, or the fulfilment of the modern state, a vehicle of some cosmic destiny. From the opposite perspective, an embittered Clausewitz would write, ‘Invasion only calls forth resistance, and it is not until there is resistance that there is war. A conqueror is always a lover of peace (as Buonaparte always asserted of himself); he would like to make his entry into our state unopposed.’<sup>485</sup> Here the ethical distinction becomes evident: Clausewitz takes a moral stance and ‘blames’ one political actor, whereas Hegel avoids blaming one or the other of the fighting parties, leaving it to history to pass judgment.

If both Hegel and Clausewitz refer to Napoleon in ‘godly’ terms, what differentiates the two is again what we saw in the above section on the trinity.

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<sup>484</sup> Hegel to Niethammer, Oct. 13, 1806. Hegel: The Letters, translated by Clark Butler and Christine Seiler with commentary by Clark Butler, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press)

<sup>485</sup> Clausewitz. *On War*, Bk. VI, Ch. 5, p. 374



Clausewitz does not jump naïvely into concepts of perfection, whether it is with regard to instrumentality or to pure reason, and he is the same with regard to Napoleon as well. He describes him as a ‘god of war’, and places him on par with, or even above, the greatest military geniuses of history, but nonetheless criticizes his actions and describes in detail the strategic ‘errors’ and ‘true faults’<sup>486</sup> in how he conducted his campaign leading up to his defeat at Waterloo, including ‘useless’ march and counter-march of 20,000 soldiers that amounted to a ‘capital mistake’.<sup>487</sup> In the 1814 Campaign, Clausewitz goes so far as to refer to Napoleon’s final march towards Paris as ‘empty’, a ‘supreme risk’, the ‘gravest error of the campaign’, and in its final movement, Napoleon suddenly appeared ‘in all his ridiculousness’.<sup>488</sup>

### Critique: The Limits of Instrumentality

Though Clausewitz allowed for imperfections in the process or application of ‘instrumentalizing’ violence, he did not present instrumentalization as having inherent problems within its inner logic, and this is the true limit of the concept. The logic that binds Clausewitz’s notion that the state or actor is morally responsible for war, and can in fact be *blamed*, is rooted in the instrumentality of war, that is, since war can achieve objectives that may be morally acceptable or not, then it is legitimate to pass judgement on those who make the policy of war. But the entire premise of the relationship depends on two important criteria: first, that the weapons being used can

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<sup>486</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *Campagne de 1815 en France*, tr. M Niessel, (Paris: Édition Champs Libre, 1973), p. 170

<sup>487</sup> Clausewitz, *Campagne de 1815 en France*, p. 98

<sup>488</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *Campagne de 1814*, tr. G. Duval de Fraville, (Paris: Édition Champs Libre, 1973), p. 82

in fact be used *instrumentally*, that is, they can in fact coerce in the direction of a legitimate policy change. Secondly, if the actor is to be a moral agent, then a second criteria upon which to gauge this morality must be added to the first, that this violence be applied in a sufficiently proportional way for the decision itself to be ethically reasonable (i.e. that it is not genocide or massacre). The strain on these criteria has always existed in some relative way, and indeed, massacres during and after battle, against soldiers and civilians alike, are as old as time, but this strain can become increasingly absolute as war becomes ever more infused with indiscriminate destructive power. This means that to explore the limits of Clausewitz's instrumentality as an ethical foundation, we should push our analysis temporarily by a hundred years after it was actually written, because in Clausewitz's time, the machinery of war had not yet seen the impact of industrialization, let alone the nuclear age. In the early 1800s, the most damaging arguments against the logic that binds Clausewitz's ethical system could not yet be made. Though we are breaking away from the central course of the narration so far, this jump forward will eventually form an important grounding element of our discussion of how the limits of Hegelian and Clausewitzian ethics shaped modern secular war and revolution.

The simplest way to illustrate the problem in material terms is to consider how nuclear weapons can turn the strategic element of war upside down. Tactical nuclear weapons would make such minced meat out of any invasion force as to make invading a nuclear power tactically unmanageable, whereas the use of strategic nuclear weapons would make invasion strategically irrelevant, unless one is intent on staking territorial claims in a radioactive fallout area. The instrumentality in this case is not merely disrupted, it is reversed altogether since the instrument no longer shapes or arrives at the end, but destroys the end in its approach. In this reversal, the agent

remains *responsible* for the action, but the action itself becomes so counter-intuitive that to claim responsibility, either by the side that launches the strike or the government that sends its troops to be massacre in one, is in effect to admit guilt, rather than justification. If it were merely a question of disproportionality, then the judgment might be severe, but that is not the question. The apparent uselessness of the action itself leads to a categorical, not merely severe, judgment. That being said, this is only a preliminary thought on the matter, since, as we shall consider in the coming lines, we must also distinguish between actually fighting of such a war, and *threatening to do so*.

Some have viewed the problems of instrumentality as a way to brush aside Clausewitz altogether, arguing that his means/ends analysis has become incompatible with the modern world. If nuclear weapons are what made this observation most clear to them, Colin Grey traces back the problem to an earlier time:

*The atom has simply served to make unavoidably clear what has been true all along since the day of the introduction of the machine gun and the internal combustion engine into the techniques of warfare [...] that modern warfare in the grand manner, pursued by all available means and aimed at the total destruction of the enemy's capacity to resist, is [...] of such general destructiveness that it ceases to be useful as an instrument of any coherent political purpose.*<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Chris Hables Gray, *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 138

Along the same line of argumentation, Senator W. Fulbright would add that the disproportionality of nuclear weapons had ‘deprived force of its utility as an instrument of national policy,’ adding that, ‘so long as there is reason – not virtue, but simply reason – in the foreign policy of great nations, nuclear weapons are not so much an instrument as an inhibition of policy.’<sup>490</sup> Arendt generally agreed, suggesting that ‘the technological development of the implements of violence have reached the point where no political goal could conceivably correspond to their destructive potential or justify their actual use in armed conflict.’<sup>491</sup>

Going so far as to say that Clausewitz’s system is no longer applicable or useful in the nuclear age is quite an overstatement. As Moody countered, ‘Even if it is always irrational to fight nuclear war, it may not be irrational to risk nuclear war.’<sup>492</sup> Moody goes so far as to question whether or not Fulbright manages to show a real contradiction: ‘In Clausewitzian terms, [Fulbright] is saying that what can be achieved *by* war is negated by the means used *in* war: war no longer pays. But this does not show that Clausewitz is obsolete: it is precisely on Clausewitzian grounds that war is to be avoided.’<sup>493</sup> Indeed, nuclear weapons are in some ways the epitome of the Clausewitzian triad: where the ‘absolute’ concept of war is the annihilation of all mankind; the ‘limited’ concept of war is the impossible cost or ultimate contradiction of this absolute; and ‘instrumentality’ is the capacity for the government to calculate a rational course of action, which would guarantee its own self-preservation – in this case, avoiding an all out nuclear holocaust.

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<sup>490</sup> Moody, Peter. *The Fading Dialectic*, World Politics, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Apr., 1979), p. 418, citing: J. William Fulbright, *The Foundations of National Security*, in Morton A. Kaplan, ed. *Great Issues of International Politics* (2d ed. Chicago: Aldine 1974), p 255.

<sup>491</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1970), p. 3

<sup>492</sup> Moody, Peter. *The Fading Dialectic*. p 419

<sup>493</sup> Idem.

A second way to address Fulbright's perspective is to ask whether the existence of new, more potent and awe-inspiring weapons changes and undermines the purposes of violence and threat of violence in international relations, or rather reaffirms and intensifies notions for which traditional armaments were sought, namely the impetus of the powerful to sustain a permanent form of the geopolitical status-quo, and the use of threat as economical and rational means of achieving ends without engaging in battle, what Sun Tzu referred to as the 'acme of skill.'<sup>494</sup>

The evolution of weapons in war necessarily affects the way in which tactics and strategies are drawn out and implemented, yet the question of whether or not this implies ontological changes in the nature of war, is not as clear-cut as Fulbright, Grey and others might claim. Actually, Clausewitz's own formulation in many ways addresses the problem which Fulbright is using against him. In Book II, Chapter 1 of *On War*, Clausewitz wrote, 'Fighting has determined everything appertaining to arms and equipment, and these in turn modify the mode of fighting; there is, therefore, a reciprocity of action [Wechselwirkung] between the two.'<sup>495</sup> This notion of reciprocity of action allows for the principles of war to be defined by weapons only insofar as the weapons themselves come into being in response to the needs of war. Instead of disrupting the theoretical constructs of a dialectical war theory, the weapons and strategies evolve in mutuality, within, rather than opposed to the overarching theory. This is also observable in the response, or reciprocity of action between the evolution of weapons in the past decades, which instead of building ever more powerful weapons, brought forth ever more precise ones, so as to reaffirm proportionality in warfare.

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<sup>494</sup> Sun Tzu, *Art of War*. Tr. Griffith (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 77.

<sup>495</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Book II, Ch 1, p. 64.

Modern weapons did not prove Clausewitz wrong, less so in fact when we consider that his analysis of the development of weapons predicts ever more powerful and precise systems of force. What is more interesting still is that Clausewitz regularly referred to war as game [Spiel], and these weapons have elevated the game aspect of war ever more since the reduction of instrumentality in this case has lead to, as Moody indentified a willingness to risk, but not necessarily fight war. What happened in effect is that *we went from waging war to wagering war*. Strategy is not gone even though the stakes have risen. There has been a relative decline in instrumentality, which has changed the way we play the game, but the strategy remains a different set of game theory is in place.

In order to understand the proper conceptual end point to instrumentality, it is better not to let the material question dictate our analysis, but rather consider an idea of war which builds in the end of instrumentality into its very essence. Whereas the doctrine of ‘mutually assured destruction’ is the epitome of the technology argument against instrumentality, and remains partial because of the difference between wagering nuclear war and waging nuclear war, the concept of a ‘war to end all wars’, depending on how it has been constructed, can break down instrumentality in a way that is altogether freed of any external, material cause. To be clear, in using the term ‘war to end all wars’, should not be understood as the impression after the fact or during, such as was the case with World War I, that the war having been so brutal, there would be no going back to war, it *would be the last* such war. Rather, it is meant to describe a type of war which, from the very start, is declared as a war to end all wars. Only one such concept of war was ever invented and eventually applied: the communist and anarchist revolution, in which the revolution was posited on the

premise that its fulfilment in violence would necessarily put an end to the social structures that generate war in the first place.

The circularity and totality of the proposition is such that it can never achieve its end until there is nothing left to fight. It is as annihilatory in essence as mutually assured destruction, though the capacity may not be there. That is, the war to end all wars is its own inferno and has no conceptual limit, because having been posited as a war that has no end except its own, it must and will always find something to fight, eventually fighting itself internally. It is the nature of social structures and institutions, that they will legitimize their continued *raison d'être*. The war to end all wars is necessarily self-perpetuating: for the same reason that a hammer must have a something to hit to be of use, and cannot be used to hit itself, war that has been posited as instrumental in ending itself as an instrument is logically impossible, because each action produces a counter-action, escalation, reciprocal violence, etc. Thus, even if full victory were eventually *declared* by these warriors, the fact that the victory was built on war and blood, not consensus and evolution, would set into the foundations of society an institutional violence that begets violence and perpetuates a war to end all wars, which by definition never actually ends. The only way it ends is when a counter-force is applied to end the circular perpetuation.

In both the example from modern weapons and the logic of a war to end all wars, instrumentality becomes problematic, because the tool cannot properly shape its object towards the desired effect. There is a parallel to be drawn here with what we concluded upon in chapter one with regard to Hegel. History has shown imperfections in the concepts of war as a right and as an instrument, in the former, because the relationship between political decay and war, could be shown to be reversible, and in the latter, because the linearity of instrumentality in war cannot properly cope with

weapons that undermine the relationship between cause and effect and concepts of war that are circular in their logic. These imperfections however are not absolute. They do not undermine Hegel and Clausewitz altogether, though they impose on the reader a higher level of consideration and critical analysis. In the case of Hegel, this meant addressing the effects of the increased distance that separates the citizens from the role of embodying the political will of the state. The intersection of the two therefore resides at the nexus of technology and revolution, a subject that we shall enter in the next chapter.

## Conclusion

The Hegel-Clausewitz connection is not clear-cut like the one between Kant and Clausewitz, which we explored in Part I. One possible explanation for this is that as a young scholar, Clausewitz was less confident in his writing and made far more use of direct borrowing in his attempts to develop his arguments, whereas in his later years, Clausewitz had found his own voice and could borrow ideas less directly, and integrate them to his works in his own words. This may be part of the explanation. Of course, the second element which we have seen above is that while there was clearly a convergence over time between Clausewitz's ideas and the works of Hegel, this incremental convergence remained incomplete in the end. Regardless of how satisfied we are with the level of proximity between the two, it remains nonetheless extremely unsatisfactory to claim that there was no rapprochement. We find ourselves with a compromise: the Hegelian link is imperfect, it does not take the form of a single



citation, a clear and demonstrable ‘influence’, but an evolution in thought, a progression in time, and this has shown itself more manageable as a conclusion than the alternative one found in Aron, where the categorical argument citing a lack of a Hegelian influence is limited to sections written by a young Clausewitz, as opposed to a mature one, or found in Paret, where the question is brushed aside, the conclusion asserted, and the demonstration never actually made. We find ourselves with a demonstrated convergence, but not a demonstrated influence. It is up to the reader to make the leap from one to the other if they see fit.

The principal outcome of this exploration was to show that the different approach Clausewitz and Hegel had to the question of objectivity and subjectivity created the chasm between war as a right and war as an instrument of the political. As we saw in chapter one and again in the final pages of chapter three, these two notions have inherent imperfections, which do not necessarily take away from their utility *per se*, but nonetheless can help us explain how the two parallel theories came to be understood and applied over time, especially with regard to major changes in the causes and machinery of war, as well as the objectives of war. As we move now into a chapter that considers 20<sup>th</sup> century warfare and revolution, the actual implication of this ethical divide on military doctrines will be explored.

## Chapter 4 – Fighting Doctrines and Revolutionary Ethics

If it was at the threshold of revolution that Clausewitz encountered the fragility of the absolute war / real war dichotomy on the ontological level, the ambitious Marxist and anarchist project for an ‘absolute’ revolution would in the end bring out in a thoroughly analogous way, the fragility and limits of the instrument / right divide on the ethical level. This is the main reason why the anti-bourgeois revolutionary thinkers are an interesting group to consider in our discussion of dialectical war theory. That being said, there are other reasons as well. Not only were they among the earliest to discover and integrate Clausewitz & Hegel into a set of fighting doctrines, which means they were absorbing the primary sources directly, as opposed to reading tainted secondary interpretations, they also did so as dialecticians themselves, which means they appreciated the depth of the method. They were an informed embodiment of the method, and therefore informative to our study of the method as it was applied in the real world. However, the most important and interesting feature to be discovered here is that they took in the distinct elements of Hegel and Clausewitz very categorically in their respective fighting doctrines: the communists were exclusively Clausewitzian, whereas the anarchists shunned Clausewitz and kept exclusively to Hegel. There was no overlap.

In the coming lines, it will become clear that previous chapter’s thesis regarding the ethical divide between right and instrumentality had a direct bearing on the fighting doctrines and history of the anti-bourgeois revolutions. Using a history of ideas approach to the question we shall consider and elaborate on the thesis of a ‘Clausewitz connection’ which has been evoked to describe the link between communists and Clausewitzian war theory, and thereafter repeat the process with the anarchists in order to show a parallel but distinct ‘Hegel connection’ on their side of the revolution. Uncovering this allows us to discover the purified implications of war

as a 'right' or 'instrument' in the context of modern war and revolution, which ultimately exposes in real terms, real examples, the logical breaking points of either ethic, and which particular concept of freedom, common to both communists and anarchists allowed them to overcome the distinction and understand their revolutions as distinct, but unified under a single overarching ideal that emerges from the divide and encompasses it as well.

There was such a keen appreciation for Clausewitz among the communists that western observers have often invoked a 'Clausewitz connection',<sup>496</sup> in reference to the fact that Mao, Trotsky and Lenin were so prone to quote from his opus. However, the problem with this idea of 'connection' is that it suggests a direct, immediate and natural link between the two, which is not so clear-cut once we actually dive into the details. As dialecticians sharing a common philosophical link to Hegel and Kant, we might indeed have expected that when the Marxists discovered Clausewitz, they were predisposed to appreciate the methodology, because it was so closely intertwined with their own. One might go so far as to suggest that Marx was to political economy what Clausewitz was to war, the one who, having inherited the modern dialectical method, would be the first to apply it to a specific subject of inquiry, economics and war, respectively. And yet, despite this methodological unity the convergence was not immaculately conceived amongst communists, but actually required some tinkering, and it was not Marx and Engels who became devout Clausewitzians, but rather the next generation of communists, Trotsky and Lenin.

With revolution now entering the forefront of the communist experience, the works of Clausewitz did in fact take centre stage. However, what they extracted from the opus was in no way its methodological or dialectical aspects, but a mere distillation for particular strategic gains. Pending some distortions and much cherry-

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<sup>496</sup> Azar Gat. 'Clausewitz and the Marxists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 27 (1992), p. 366.

picking of ideas, the communist revolutionaries had a very practical and isolated reading of Clausewitz, rather than a comprehensive one.

Meanwhile, in the same family lineage, the fathers of anti-bourgeois anarchist thought Bakunin, Proudhon<sup>497</sup> and Kropotkin did not deign make any references to Clausewitz at all.<sup>498</sup> They shunned him altogether. It is indeed surprising, since they too shared in this common methodological background, and would undoubtedly have come across Clausewitz, given that he had been introduced to left-wing circles. Instead, we find that in anarchist thought, there evolved a parallel, distinct, and direct ‘Hegel connection’ in their concept of the revolution and their fighting doctrine. The split between the two factions is clear and total, and once we take the time to understand where it comes from, it is actually quite logical. The breakdown tells us something about how the two groups understood the ethics of political violence as ‘instrumental’ in the Clausewitzian tradition, or as a ‘right’ in the Hegelian tradition. While this distinction complicated the integration of Clausewitz into communist doctrine, it made him altogether irrelevant to anarchist doctrine. Methodological keenness therefore had little to do with the two distinct ‘connections’; it was rather the ethical dimensions on either side that led one group to identify its fighting doctrines with Clausewitz, while the other chose Hegel.

The reason why this historical set of questions is of relevance to anyone currently reading Clausewitz or Hegel on the subject of war is that uncovering why all this picking and choosing happened in the first place allows us to distinguish and understand the systems of logic found in either of these two founding works in the

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<sup>497</sup> I mention Proudhon here for the sake of widening area in which Clausewitz appears to be absent, that is, what the anarchist fighting doctrine ‘was not’, but have chosen, for the sake of expediency rather than exhaustiveness, to exclude this author from the discussion that actually ‘describes’ the anarchist fighting doctrine, later in this article.

<sup>498</sup> This observation is made possible thanks to keyword searches and the availability of vast archives of works by these authors on the website of the Marxist Internet Archive found here: [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org).

school of ‘dialectical war theory’, and most importantly, the ethical and strategic implications of these differences. By showcasing the distinction in a parallel study, we gain insight into how overarching, abstract ethical frameworks can, and indeed have, shaped fighting doctrines in real and concrete ways.

### The Communist ‘Clausewitz Connection’

It is difficult to frame communism into a single family of revolutionaries and thinkers, and the danger in doing so is to risk finding ourselves with a blanket term that does not quite apply in encompassing all the nuances that one variation on communist thought might have relative to another. That being said, since this question is outside the scope of this chapter, it should be specified that the use of the term here refers to those anti-bourgeois revolutionaries who advocated for a political revolution that would *precede* the economic and cultural revolution, which is to say, those who believed in the necessity of a revolutionary state to carry out the program of revolution as its policy.

The ‘Clausewitz connection’ refers to the fact that many prominent communists cited him, including Marx and Engels, Mao, Trotsky, and Lenin. One might be tempted to assume that since the two founders are included among the lot of ‘connectees’ it would explain in what sense the remaining followers followed. It is an easy trap to fall into, and the reality is rather that the earlier two were actually quite critical of Clausewitz and made little use of him. It was the later revolutionaries who would make use of the text, but only in a shallow fashion, citing a few key snippets that could be easily adapted to Marxist thought.

Indeed, it was necessary to ‘adapt’ Clausewitz to make him relevant to the communists, and provide them with a useful guide in their politico-strategic deployment of the revolution, under the auspices of a revolutionary state. This was achieved by Lenin, not Marx and Engels, as the first who provided the proper basis with which to work out the contradictions and kinks, and integrate Clausewitz’s ideas to the revolution. This was no easy problem to resolve, but something quite fundamental: if the state is a central pillar in the works of Hegel and Clausewitz, how can a group intent on attacking and dismantling the state find a coherent logic which balances the use of a statist method against the state itself? However, before we answer this larger question, let us first step back, and show in what sense prior to Lenin, Clausewitz occupied little or no place in Communist thought generally, and particularly in their conception of a fighting doctrine.

Marx and Engels discussed Clausewitz in their correspondence on the subject of war between the years 1857-1862. That being said, many academics have exaggerated the significance of these short snippets, which is best exemplified in Sigmund Neumann’s writing that not only was Engels ‘greatly impressed’, but that Clausewitz became ‘stock-in-trade’ for the revolutionaries and ‘axiomatic’ for Engels.<sup>499</sup> Lenin too was convinced that Engels and Marx were fundamentally Clausewitzian, as he alludes to in this passage:

War is the continuation of politics by other (i.e. violent) means.

This famous aphorism was uttered by one of the profoundest writers on the problems of war, Clausewitz. Marxists have always rightly regarded this thesis as the theoretical basis of views concerning the

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<sup>499</sup> Sigmund Neumann. ‘Engels and Marx on Revolution’, in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 265-266.

significance of every given war. It was precisely from this viewpoint that Marx and Engels always regarded different wars.<sup>500</sup>

This paragraph does not make an argument, let alone demonstrates, that Marx and Engels were all that influenced by Clausewitz. It achieves neither, but instead takes this for granted. The only conclusion we can draw from this passage is rather the confirmation that Lenin himself was probably keen on Clausewitz. Lenin was in fact ‘deeply impressed’ by *On War*, referring to it in speeches, texts, after first having commented in the margins of his copy and transcribed sections in his notebook.<sup>501</sup>

Opposing this claim made by Lenin and later by numerous others including Neumann, Azar Gat’s Clausewitz and the Marxists proposes a more detailed counter-argument, which cuts the legs from under such an interpretation, by balancing the one aspect of enthusiasm that Marx and Engels showed with regard to the single analogy ‘Combat is to war what cash payment is to commerce,’<sup>502</sup> relative to their overall appreciation, which lags far behind. Gat notes that before describing this passage as ‘witty’ [witz], Marx’s letter first stated that he was ‘hunting through [Clausewitz] more or less’, which can hardly be considered keenness; in fact, the passage on commerce was cherry picked by Engels and sent to Marx, knowing that it would be ‘a piece of picantry in a field which could be of interest to Marx’,<sup>503</sup> which makes sense

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<sup>500</sup> Vladimir Ilitsch Lenin, ‘Socialism and War, The Attitude of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party Towards the War’, in *Lenin Selected Texts*, Foreign Languages Press, 1970, Peking, Volume 21, pages 295-338, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/s+w/>

<sup>501</sup> Beatrice Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz* (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 19, 46-47. Azar Gat also notes in *A History of Military Thought From The Enlightenment To The Cold War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) p. 504, that Lenin was enthusiastic about all passages that referred to war’s historical nature, next to which he repeatedly placed annotations.

<sup>502</sup> Marx, Letter to Engels Jan. 11, 1858, *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Volume 40, International Publishers, New York, 1983. p. 241

<sup>503</sup> Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought From The Enlightenment To The Cold War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 499. It is worth noting that this chapter entitled ‘Marxism and Military Theory’ is a polished version of Gat’s 1992 article, ‘Clausewitz and the Marxists’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 27 (1992),

since, as we shall delve into more further below, Marx was the economist of the two, while warfare was Engels's area, and his friends even called him 'The General' for it.<sup>504</sup> Regarding the word 'Witz' it might be worth adding the possibility that while Marx made this compliment with regard to Clausewitz's analogy, he may also have chosen the term for the sake of making a playful jest on the name Clause-witz. (And indeed, we find occasional banter in the letters between the two friends. Another example of this playfulness is forthcoming.) If that were the case, it would further taper the extent of its significance.

Another example, which Gat also includes in his text, comes from the same series of letters: Engels wrote that *On War* was 'per se very good', which again is not a grand compliment, especially given that these words lead up to it, '[Clausewitz has an] odd way of philosophizing' and in the same exchange Marx complains that he had to 'spend so much time reading Clausewitz', which might explain indeed why he wound up reading it only 'more or less'. That being said, it is impossible to determine, simply in the one line where it appears, whether Marx's mention of the word "witty" is in reply, as Gat suggests, only to the commerce analogy and not a wider reading of Clausewitz.<sup>505</sup> If it had been the only introduction he had to Clausewitz this would be a logical assumption, but as Gat notes himself, Marx had read pieces of *On War* several months earlier. It was indeed Marx who introduced the subject of Clausewitz into the conversation several months earlier.<sup>506</sup>

One must therefore tread carefully in making sense of such a disparate set of somewhat positive, somewhat negative reactions. Citing the same passages above, Gat concludes that, '[neither Marx or Engels] had any special interest in, or

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid., p. 496.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid., p. 499

<sup>506</sup> Ibid., p. 498



appreciation of Clausewitz's work.'<sup>507</sup> This might be slightly too strong, at least in the case of Engels. As for Marx, it is not a stretch to say that he showed little or no interest, it was true of war in general. He was far more interested in economics, and preferred relegating the topic of war to Engels, going so far as to offer some friendly teasing at the expense of the latter, 'It strikes me that you allow yourself to be influenced by the military aspect of things a little too much. As to the economic stuff, I don't propose to burden you with it on your journey.'<sup>508</sup> Knowing this about Marx, it becomes frankly laughable, to stand with Vincent Esposito, who wrote that 'Marx rejoiced at finding in such an eminent military authority substantiation for his own theory of the relationship between war and politics. Thereafter, Clausewitz became imbedded in revolutionary doctrine.'<sup>509</sup> Marx had no such interest at all.

However, given that Marx and Engels worked so closely together, and were at times ghostwriting<sup>510</sup> for one another or co-signing articles and texts, it is not enough to demonstrate that one of the two was not interested, since the two in many ways were but one. In the case of Engels, claiming a complete detachment from Clausewitzian thought can only be achieved by elevating some passages at the expense of others, just as those who claim an opposite viewpoint did.

The text that Gat cites to nail his case shut is not an altogether fair assessment of the relationship. It is a letter to J. Weydemeyer from 1853, in which Engels writes '[in the end] Jomini gives the best account of [the Napoleonic Wars]; despite many fine things, I can't really bring myself to like that natural genius, Clausewitz.'<sup>511</sup> The

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<sup>507</sup> Ibid., p. 494

<sup>508</sup> Marx, Letter to Engels Sept 10, 1862, Marx/Engels Collected Works, Volume 40, International Publishers, New York, 1983. p. 415

<sup>509</sup> Vincent J. Esposito. 'War as a Continuation of Politics', *Military Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Spring, 1954), pp. 19-26

<sup>510</sup> See Gat, p. 496. Engels wrote articles that appeared under Marx's name in the Manchester Guardian and the Pall Mall Gazette, for example.

<sup>511</sup> Engels, Letter to Joseph Weydemeyer April 12, 1853, Marx/Engels Collected Works, Volume 39, International Publishers, New York, 1983. p. 303

fact is that this reaction predates the discussion with Marx by five years, and represents Engels's earliest reading of the text. As late as June 1851, Engels had not yet read Clausewitz, as he explains in a prior letter to the same man,<sup>512</sup> but soon thereafter, in early 1853, he knows *On War* well enough to comment on the whole, negatively. The timeframe is relatively precise, we can essentially pinpoint Engels first reading of Clausewitz within an 18 month range, which corresponds well with Gallie's suggestion that an article written for the *New York Daily Tribune* in September 1852 showed a 'trace of a hasty first reading of Clausewitz in the opening sentences.'<sup>513</sup> This fits exactly where we would expect it.

It is therefore rash to cite such an early reaction by Engels, in arguing a formal dislike of Clausewitz, since anyone who reads *On War* for the first time could in all honesty feel that way, but upon returning to it for a second or third read they might arrive at a complete different take on the matter. The same can be said regarding the works of Marx and Engels.

We should therefore focus our attention to the letters that appear after 1858, at which point we know that Engels has become sufficiently well-acquainted to with Clausewitz, enough to introduce Marx to a few points of interest, including a reference to the war as a science vs. an art and the analogy with commerce.<sup>514</sup> Here we find ourselves forced into a middle ground between Gat's stance and those on the other extreme, or rather an off-centre ground which is much closer to Gat's viewpoint. If neither Engels nor Marx had been influenced by Clausewitz beyond the mere snippets exchanged in the three letters of 1858, it should have been expected that the

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<sup>512</sup> Engels, Letter to Joseph Weydemeyer June 19, 1851, Marx/Engels Collected Works, Volume 38, International Publishers, New York, 1982. p. 370.

<sup>513</sup> W. B. Gallie, *Philosophers of War and Peace: Kant, Clausewitz, Marx, Engels and Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 82.

<sup>514</sup> Engels, Letter to Marx Jan. 7, 1858, Marx/Engels Collected Works, Volume 41, International Publishers, New York, 1985. p. 358

subject would have disappeared altogether, among all the other considerations the two had to keep in mind in their political activism and literary contributions. However, we find rather that the two continued to refer to Clausewitz in the years that followed, even Marx began a text in 1859 in which he cites *On War* on the subject of Austrian war plans. Engels uses Clausewitz in 1862 in his discussion of the American Civil War, and refers to him again in 1871 on the topic of the Napoleonic wars. If Clausewitz were as insignificant as Gat seems to indicate, why would he still be on Engels's mind roughly 20 years after he first read the book?

That being said, while the 'Clausewitz connection' to Marx and Engels was long-lasting, it remained somewhat weak and definitely sporadic. Engels's interest in Jomini is well-evidenced in Gat's work,<sup>515</sup> and it appears all the more true when one turns Engels's writings on the American Civil War, where three additional examples are striking. Engels uses what Jomini describes as the 'fundamental principle'<sup>516</sup> in two distinct ways, first in discussing the need to 'cut the secessionists' territory in two and enable the Unionists to beat one part after another,'<sup>517</sup> and later in arguing that the north should sacrifice minor positions in order to strike harder on the decisive points. And finally, in a most damning example of a non-Clausewitzian point of view, Engels completely undermines the moral aspects of war, when writing, 'The seizure of Richmond and the advance of the Potomac army further south — difficult on account of the many rivers that cut across the line of march -could produce a tremendous

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<sup>515</sup> Gat. pp. 498-501. Gat's quotations include Clausewitz writing that 'Jomini gives the best account [of the Napoleonic campaigns' and a reference to Engels's reaction the Austro-Prussian war of 1866 which sounds like classic Jominian doctrine. (In the article form, Gat text spells out the fact that he is referring Jomini's idea that one should not divide his forces, but this was dropped from the chapter version.)

<sup>516</sup> This fundamental principle consists of 'bring[ing] forth, through strategic combinations, the bulk of the forces of an army, successively upon decisive points in a theatre of war [... and] manoeuvr[ing] against fractions of the enemy army.' Antoine-Henri Jomini, *Précis de l'art de la guerre* (Paris: Perrin, 2001), p. 158

<sup>517</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The American Civil War* (originally published in Vienna: Die Presse, March 1862), Marx/Engels Collected Works, Volume 19, International Publishers, New York, 1983. p. 186

moral effect. From a purely military standpoint, they would decide *nothing*.’<sup>518</sup> The continued references to Clausewitz years after Engels first discovered him suggest some affinities, albeit not on the most important of his ideas, such as the moral forces, and, evidently, *On War*’s highly effective refutation of Jominian positive doctrines. It therefore appears all the more likely that Engels and Marx were not in any serious way devout Clausewitzians, and that Engels, at least, shows much closer ties to Jominian than to Clausewitzian thought. That being said, the fact that Marx and Engels introduced Clausewitz to the communist movement did make its mark, and no doubt contributed to its uptake in communism’s revolutionary phase.

In the end, any attempt to pinpoint the views of Engels and Marx on war must inevitably hit the unfortunate realization that it was not actually central to their theorizing on communism. Engels, who was the analytical mind, rather than the synthetic mind of the two, was busy contextualizing and understanding conflicts, but did not produce any compelling overall ‘communist theory of war’. And Marx would not either, simply out of general disinterest in these matters. A communist theory of war would emerge logically, and in due time, when it was needed: when communism entered its revolutionary phase.

If war had not been a central pillar of early communist theorizing, eventually Lenin is the one who would ‘put it there.’<sup>519</sup> The main problem was how communists understood statehood and policy as subjective, rather than objective.

Apply [Marx and Engels’s] view to [World War I]. You will see that for decades, for almost half a century, the governments and the ruling classes of England, and France, and Germany, and Italy, and Austria,

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<sup>518</sup> Idem.

<sup>519</sup> Jacob W. Kipp. ‘Lenin and Clausewitz: The Militarization of Marxism, 1914-1921’, *Military Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Oct., 1985), p. 184.

and Russia, pursued a policy of plundering colonies, of oppressing other nations, of suppressing the working-class movement. It is this, and only this policy that is being continued in the present war.<sup>520</sup>

The issue of Marx's disagreement with Hegel is alluded to in Gat's discussion of Lenin,<sup>521</sup> but is worth developing it slightly further, in order to see not only how it influenced Lenin's interpretation of Clausewitz, but in a larger sense, how this argument complicated the direct or coherent uptake of Clausewitz towards communist doctrine. To appreciate the problem, it is best to go back to the origin, when Marx, in the process of applying a Hegelian methodology to his interrogations on society and economics, eventually found himself in disagreement with Hegel. Marx built a conceptual history of the world in which the proletariat and bourgeoisie were inherently opposed, and historically bound towards their historical transcendence, a formula quite similar to the master slave dichotomy presented in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*. In the *Phenomenology*, the overcoming of dichotomies, or 'Aufhebung', is described as an '... abstract negation, not the negation characteristic of consciousness, which cancels in such a way that it preserves and maintains what is sublated, and thereby survives its being sublated.'<sup>522</sup> The revolution represented a reaction to the idea that the bourgeoisie exists only insofar as it subjugates the proletariat (much as there can be no master without a slave), the act of creating it represents in fact the creation of a negative reciprocation of itself; and more importantly, the more the bourgeois class exploits and organizes the proletariat to

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<sup>520</sup> Lenin, 'Socialism and War, The Attitude of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party Towards the War', *Lenin Collected Works*, Foreign Languages Press, 1970, Peking, Volume 21, pages 295-338. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/s+w/ch01.htm>

<sup>521</sup> Gat, p. 505-506.

<sup>522</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, vol. 1, tr. J. B. Baillie, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), p. 181.

maximize its efficiency and wealth-productiveness, the more it empowers it with the capacity to overthrow the capitalist order of production and provides reasons for doing so. The end point is anti-political, in that once the revolution is achieved, only stateless free, classless men and women remain; to reach this end goal is a political process, a policy-making initiative that dictates warfare *towards* building the socio-economic and cultural bases of an anti-political society. The relationship is linear. And what remains of the proletarian and bourgeois class is merely their history, their moment in leading towards a classless human existence ... their 'Aufhebung'.

Marx explains in *Capital* that while his methodology Hegelian in spirit, he was in fact challenging the system as a whole, referring to his own work as Hegel's 'direct opposite', turning the methodology onto itself and 'standing it on its head.'<sup>523</sup> Years earlier, Marx had also written in his doctoral thesis that he disagreed with Hegel on the threshold that separates the mystical from the political, that is, in Hegel, the state is understood as a 'vehicle of cosmic spirit'<sup>524</sup> or 'Geist', the spirit of rationality making itself manifest in the world. Since the concept of the state in Hegel is understood as a necessary, natural, and rational development of freely constituted peoples, inherently embodying their collective greater good, this poses a problem to Marx, who, seeing an entire class of exploited people having become the means of production, without having either access to the decision-making bodies or even the fruit of their own labour, he wonders if these men are indeed free. And are they in fact freely-constituted, or have they inherited an authority structure which coerces them into a dehumanizing role in society? This is the root of Marx's disagreement with Hegel. For Marx, the state is not an end in-itself or a means to a higher spiritual end,

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<sup>523</sup> Karl Marx, Afterword of 1873, *Capital*, Vol. 1, ed. Frederick Engels, tr. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1999), .

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p3.htm>

<sup>524</sup> Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 119.

and thus not a result of a universal, objective idea, but rather an instrument that would generate and maintain a subjective idea, in this case, capitalism, and its usurpation of political power towards its own ends. As the paragraph below explains, the state is a subjective idea that attempts, strives to pass itself off as objective:

The fact is that the state issues from the mass of men existing as members of families and of civil society; but speculative philosophy<sup>525</sup> expresses this fact as an achievement of the Idea, not the idea of the mass, but rather as the deed of an Idea-Subject which is differentiated from the fact itself) in such a way that the function assigned to the individual (earlier the discussion was only of the assignment of individuals to the spheres of family and civil society) is visibly mediated by circumstances, caprice, etc. Thus empirical actuality is admitted just as it is and is also said to be rational; but not rational because of its own reason, but because the empirical fact in its empirical existence has a significance which is other than it itself. The fact, which is the starting point, is not conceived to be such but rather to be the mystical result. The actual becomes phenomenon, but the Idea has no other content than this phenomenon. Moreover, the idea has no other than the logical aim, namely, 'to become explicit as infinite actual mind.'<sup>526</sup>

Since the Marxists question from the very onset the idea that states possess an objective universality, it would be impossible for them to come to terms directly with

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<sup>525</sup> Speculative philosophy is the term Hegel uses to describe his own writings.

<sup>526</sup> Karl Marx, *The State as Manifestation of Idea or Product of Man: Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, ed. Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

Clausewitz's 'intelligence of the personified state',<sup>527</sup> or his 'continuation of policy by other means'.<sup>528</sup> They would be asking questions like, 'the intelligence of whose state?' and 'the policy of which class?' In more concrete terms, one place to look to in order to find the crux of this disagreement is the fact that while Hegel identified the bureaucracy as the 'universal' class in society, Marx reserved this universality to the proletariat class.<sup>529</sup> Thus, the link from the communists to Clausewitz is not at all direct, but requires some modification to be logical. It is actually formed out of a careful addition of words.

The first step for Lenin to develop coherence between Clausewitz and communism was to begin reflecting on the subject of the causes of war:

It seems to me that the most important thing that is usually overlooked in the question of war, a key issue to which insufficient attention is paid and over which there is so much dispute useless, hopeless, idle dispute, I should say is the question of the class character of the war: what caused that war, what classes are waging it, and what historical and historico-economic conditions gave rise to it.<sup>530</sup>

Upon this analysis, he would come to the conclusion that that imperialism and capitalist states made war inevitable, and only an armed struggle of the working class could eliminate war.<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, tr. J. J. Graham, ed. F. N. Maude, intro. Jan Willem Honig, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), Bk.I, Ch. 1, p. 18

<sup>528</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Bk. I, Ch. 1, p. 17

<sup>529</sup> Shlomo Avineri, *The Hegelian Origins of Marx's Political Thought*, *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Sep., 1967), pp. 39-42

<sup>530</sup> Lenin, 'War and Revolution, A Lecture Delivered on May 14, 1917', in *Collected Works*, tr. Isaac Bernard (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), Vol. 24, pp. 398-421.

<sup>531</sup> Kipp. *Lenin and Clausewitz*, pp. 184-191.



The formulation of war as the ‘continuation of policy,’ becomes very significant in this context, because Lenin had uncovered what seems to be opposing policies or ideas existing not merely in the state itself, but even at the juncture that explains the causes of war. Using this formula alone would have been problematic in serving this purpose. In the Hegelian sense especially, and the Clausewitzian sense depending on one’s reading of it, the state represents a single focal point of policy, a universal policy which is either representative of the people’s political greater good, or is essentially the people’s will and freedom, materialized in-itself-and-for-itself. Therefore, to embark on the state-toppling adventure would be a self-defeating project, an attack against one’s own institutions. Before Marxists could fully adopt the terminology of ‘continuation of policy’ they needed to clarify its distinction from the state. Instead of being a universally objective thing, or in Hegel’s words, the ‘actuality of concrete freedom’<sup>532</sup> of those who make it up, the state would come to be presented as a subjective entity, an instrument of the bourgeoisie, and its ‘policy’ not a higher purpose in itself, but the very reason for revolt: the antagonism between bourgeois policy versus proletariat policy. From this point of view, like all facets of the bourgeois state, even its wars represent one of the many forms which the exploitation of the proletariat can take. One class is sent off to fight imperial wars for the enrichment of another class. Lenin had in fact stumbled upon the fundamental problem between Marxism and the concept of war as continuation of policy – that it assumes there can be a *single policy*, when in fact many (or at least two, in this case) policies are struggling against one another. He writes:

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<sup>532</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, # 260, pp. 160-161

How, then, can we disclose and define the “substance” of a war? War is the continuation of policy. Consequently, we must examine the policy pursued prior to the war, the policy that led to and brought about the war [World War I]. If it was an imperialist policy, i.e., one designed to safeguard the interests of finance capital and rob and oppress colonies and foreign countries, then the war stemming from that policy is imperialist. If it was a national liberation policy, i.e., one expressive of the mass movement against national oppression, then the war stemming from that policy is a war of national liberation.<sup>533</sup>

If the ‘continuation of policy’ was at first contrary and destabilizing to the idea of a revolution against the state, Lenin had thus made it into its absolute opposite: an ultimate justification for the revolution, which in the very process of being stated, also served to better identify the enemy, not only in theory – the bourgeois class – but more importantly, seeing it as a usurper of political power, anchored firmly in the state as an institution in its own image, it became possible for the communist to see an attack on the state as an attack on the bourgeoisie itself. The pursuit of an alternative ‘policy’, a policy of the proletariat, and conceptualizing the war as a ‘continuation’ of *this policy*, as opposed to an objective and universal concept of ‘policy’, further anchored the premise of communism’s justification for the revolutionary state. Clausewitz’s formula was in effect reinforcing the communist doctrine in being applied.

That is why there should be no surprise to find just how important and how well cited this idea of ‘continuation of policy’ becomes amongst the revolutionary

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<sup>533</sup> Lenin, ‘The Marxist Attitude Towards War and Defence of the Fatherland’, tr. M.S. Levin, in *Lenin Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, 1964, Moscow, Volume 23, pages 29-35  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/carimarx/1.htm#v23pp64h-029>

communists. It dominates all other quotes from Clausewitz. Lenin cites it regularly and one occasion cites it three times in a single text.<sup>534</sup> Trotsky made use of the term 116 times altogether,<sup>535</sup> and it also appears in repetition at times. Eventually, this idea also found its way into the dark and poetic, dichotomous interpretation proclaimed by Mao, 'Politics is war without bloodshed; war is politics with bloodshed.'<sup>536</sup>

Whereas we might have expected that methodological affinities would explain why the 'Clausewitz connection' took form, what we find instead is that on the one hand, the founders of the Marxist methodology were not all that interested in Clausewitz, and those later Marxists, who were very Clausewitzian, were fond of only a few maxims and simple concepts they could distil, not bothering at all with Clausewitz's methodology or larger analyses. The revolutionaries were very practical and choosy in their reading. They cited Clausewitz, often, very often, but did not cite him widely or in depth. Only a pocketful of ideas made it through the communist distillation and only those which were particularly *strategic* in solving specific problems or achieving specific gains.

One specific case, which Gat discusses at length, is that of Trotsky who made much use of *On War* and showed himself in direct opposition to Engels, during a brief period of strife between the ranks, while he was serving as Minister of Defence. A disagreement emerged on the question of defining war plans and tactics within the communist movement. Trotsky referred heavily to Clausewitz in attempting to ward off a group of young military officials (Frunze, Gusev, Tukhachevsky, and others) who sought the creation of a 'Unified Military Doctrine' which would spell out the

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<sup>534</sup> Lenin. 'War and Revolution', pp. 398-421.

<sup>535</sup> This observation is based on a search of the archives of the works of Leon Trotsky available on [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org). It can be assumed that more citations would be found if the search was extended beyond this archive and in other languages as well..

<sup>536</sup> Mao Tse Tung, 'On Protracted War' a lecture given from May 26 to June 3, 1938, in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, (Peking : Foreign Language Press, 1965) pp. 152-53.

character of a communist revolutionary fighting force.<sup>537</sup> In order to quell their ambitions, Trotsky referred to Clausewitz's discussion of positive doctrines, rejecting the notion that there existed a science of war, based on internal principles.<sup>538</sup> 'There is not and there never has been a military "science"', argued Trotsky. 'What is commonly called the theory of war or military science represents not a totality of scientific laws explaining objective events but an aggregate of practical usages, methods of adaptation and proficiencies.'<sup>539</sup>

Inherent to this discussion of the science of war, the moral forces in war and the historical conditioning of war could not be far behind. Thus, Trotsky also referred to these other features of Clausewitzian thought in order to deepen and strengthen his argument against the 'Unified Military Doctrine'. In this case, he was completely turning his back on Engels's viewpoint, which was to pay little heed to the role of moral factors in war:

War is a specific form of relations between men. In consequence, war methods and war usages depend upon the anatomical and psychical qualities of individuals, upon the form of organization of the collective man, upon his technology, his physical or cultural-historical environment, and so on. The usages and methods of warfare are thus determined by changing circumstances and, therefore, they themselves can in no-wise be eternal.... An army leader requires the knowledge of a whole number of sciences in order to feel himself fully equipped for

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<sup>537</sup> Gat, p. 507.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid, 507.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid, 508.

his art. But military science does not exist; there does exist a military craft which can be raised to the level of a military art.<sup>540</sup>

Of greater interest to our overall examination regarding why communists adopted Clausewitz and anarchists did not has little to do whether or not there could be a scientific combat ‘doctrine’ for the revolutionary state and its forces, but rather what overarching, abstract doctrine was framing the whole, that is, the meaning and definition of tactics, strategy, objectives, and concept of victory. This turned out to be of grave consequence because, on the one hand, it brought forward the revolutionary fervour, the concept of ‘absolute war’, which both Fichte and Clausewitz understood as being a product of revolution. Fichte, who first coined the term used it to describe how a people rises up against a tyrant, which is to say that their political objective is absolute, because no truce or compromise is possible when the goal is to dethrone a prince and found a new government.<sup>541</sup> Clausewitz, who was familiar with this discussion by Fichte (he had read the essay and sent a letter to Fichte about it in 1809), improved the concept of ‘absolute war’ by making it more abstract and ideal, as a way to better study the propensity of war to escalate. In Clausewitz, ‘absolute war’ becomes a ‘total-concept’ [Total-Begriff] which is purely ideal and implies a concept of war devoid of all limits, material as well as to its political objectives. It is ‘barely conceivable in the purely logical sense’.<sup>542</sup> This was intended not as a real measure of war’s material potential, but more so its conceptual potential, not the wars we fight, but the wars that might be *dreamt up*. The revolutionaries entertained this

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<sup>540</sup> Leon Trotsky, Speech at the meeting of the Military Science Society attached to the Military Academy of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army, May 8, 1922, in *The Military Writings of Leon Trotsky*, Volume 5: 1921-1923, tr. Brian Pearce, (London: New Park Publications, 1973), p. 118-119.

<sup>541</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Machiavel, et autres écrits philosophiques et politiques de 1806-1807*, tr. and ed. Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut (Paris : Payot, 1981), pp-56-57.

<sup>542</sup> Antulio J. Echevarria. *Clausewitz & Contemporary War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 67.

idea of absoluteness in their war, a political objective to which there was no compromise, and for which the linear movement to this end could justify the means, and render them ever more unlimited. This clarified both the instrumentality of their war, as well as idea that the war could not be won until the other duellist was overthrown, through a series of engagements leading to a victory that is total: the opponent has been altogether annihilated politically. As Trotsky wrote:

If we consider that the purpose of our action is the overthrow of the autocracy, then, of course, we have not attained that aim .... But our tactics, comrades, are not at all based on that model [of protesting and striking]. Our actions are a series of consecutive battles . ... Understand this: in discussing whether or not we should continue the strike, we are in substance discussing whether to retain the demonstrative nature of the strike or to turn it into a decisive struggle, that is, to continue it to the point of total victory or defeat. We are not afraid of battles or defeats. Our defeats are but steps to our victory.<sup>543</sup>

From this paragraph, we can see that Trotsky fully adopted Clausewitz's view on the relationship between tactics and strategy, where the former consists of how one wins a battle and the latter represents how one uses successive battles towards a final outcome.<sup>544</sup> The logic of this sequence allowed him to imagine the notion of a 'total victory' or 'total defeat' for the revolution, based on the earlier premise that the two

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<sup>543</sup> Leon Trotsky 'The November Strike', in 1905, tr. Anya Bostock, (London: Vintage Books, 1972) permission granted to the Marxist Internet Archive, 2006.

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1907/1905/ch15.htm>

<sup>544</sup> Clausewitz, On War, Bk. II, Ch. 1, p. 65.

opposing factions or classes are in a gruesome, existential duel: failure to dismantle the bourgeois state would imply the failure to achieve the revolutionary, given that one was perceived as the complete opposite and negation of the other.

This strategic understanding of war consisting in a linear sequence of battles towards gains against the opponent is precisely the conceptual frame that explains the ‘Clausewitz connection’ among communists, because first as a political party and then as a revolutionary state, the movement is a strategic entity, it is a centralized approach to policy making that takes possession of war towards ends that it has defined and for which it thereafter takes responsibility. The idea that war is an instrument of policy is only intelligible insofar as there is agency, some entity to incarnate this ‘intelligence of the personified state’<sup>545</sup> to act as both the policy-maker and the executor of its will: war is to the communist state what the hammer and sickle are to the carpenter and a farmer. The insignia itself is a reminder of the underlying logic of the communist movement, which is a linear relationship between means and ends.

### The Anarchist ‘Hegel Connection’?

Despite the similarities between the communist and anarchist project to topple the bourgeois states by applying violence, the early anarchists snubbed Clausewitz altogether. Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin made no references to Clausewitz, even though they were writing at a time when his works were already quite renowned, including on the Left, as we saw above. In exchange, anarchist ideas about war, most strikingly in the works of Bakunin, were strictly Hegelian. Having seen what Clausewitz had to offer the communists, what made the anarchists exclude him? Not

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<sup>545</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Bk. I, Ch. 1, p. 18.

only was war as an instrument not ethically in line with the anarchist project, it was altogether unintelligible within their *non-linear, anti-political* concept of the revolution.

Indeed, the distinct doctrines of the communists and anarchists were shaped by their understanding of the political element of revolution, and most specifically, the goods and evils of the *revolutionary state*. Bakunin perceived the state as an anti-revolutionary and repressive institution by definition, which must not be maintained for a single instant, once the revolution is accomplished, no matter what pretext.<sup>546</sup> ‘Bourgeois socialists’ is the term Bakunin used to describe those who advocated that a political revolution should precede the social and economic revolution, which necessarily included all those who advocated for a revolutionary state to politically engender the remaining two facets of the revolution.<sup>547</sup> Bakunin explained:

...equality should be established in the world by a spontaneous organization of labor and collective property, by the free organization of producers' associations into communes, and free federation of communes — but nowise by means of the supreme tutelary action of the State .... It is this point which mainly divides the Socialists or revolutionary collectivists from the authoritarian Communists, the partisans of the absolute initiative of the State. The goal of both is the same. same. [...] Only the Communists imagine that they can attain through development and organization of the political power of the working classes, and chiefly of the city proletariat, aided by bourgeois

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<sup>546</sup> Jean Preposiet, *Histoire de l'anarchisme* (Paris: Tallandier, 2002), p. 247.

<sup>547</sup> Donald Clark Hodges. ‘Bakunin's Controversy with Marx: An Analysis of the Tensions within Modern Socialism’, *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (April 1960), p. 261.



radicalism — whereas the revolutionary Socialists, the enemies of all ambiguous alliances, believe, on the contrary, that this common goal can be attained not through the political but through the social (and therefore anti-political) organization and power of the working masses of the cities and villages.<sup>548</sup>

This provides us with an important clue into Clausewitz's absence from anarchist thought. If the revolution is to be 'anti-political' as Bakunin wrote, what is the use of conceptualizing the revolution and the war between classes as Clausewitz did, subjected to the political? If the whole revolution did not have to be preceded by political revolution, but could instead be achieved as a simultaneous process of socio-cultural and politico-economic liberation, then what would this revolution look like? How could violence rise to the purpose of revolution, without taking the shape of a linear policy, nor for that matter as the policy of a revolutionary state? According to Bakunin, and those who were committing targeted acts of violence, it could, insofar as these acts were coherent in themselves and with the project. They did not need to be organized in the Clausewitzian tradition as a sequence of tactics, adding up to the pursuit of strategic goals, because revolutionary acts, from the anarchist perspective, inspired revolution in being carried out and therefore contributed to the philosophical emancipation of those who perceived the deeds and admitted their legitimacy.

Hegel is omnipresent in this perception of violence as having within itself the capacity to awaken the people. Beneath it lies another idea, interconnected to the concept of 'Geist': that the revolution is not an end, but a process. There is no revolutionary state required because the revolution is itself this Spirit. Bakunin was

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<sup>548</sup> Mikhail Bakunin, 'Stateless Socialism: Anarchism', excerpts taken from G.P. Maximoff, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin* (New York, The Free Press, 1953), <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/various/soc-anar.htm>

borrowing heavily from ideas taken in the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right*, in suggesting that

Civil war, so destructive to the power of states, is, on the contrary, and because of this very fact, always favourable to the awakening of popular initiative and to the intellectual, moral, and even the material interests of the populace. And for this very simple reason: civil war upsets and shakes the masses out of their sheepish state, a condition very dear to all governments, a condition which turns peoples into herds to be utilized and shorn at the whims of their shepherds. Civil war breaks through the brutalizing monotony of men's daily existence, and arrests that mechanistic routine which robs them of creative thought.<sup>549</sup>

The revolution and its violence which are referred to in this passage reminds us of Hegel's notion that 'the ethical health of peoples is preserved in their indifference to the stabilisation of finite institutions; just as the blowing of the winds preserves the sea from the foulness which would be the result of a prolonged calm, so also corruption in nations would be the product of prolonged, let alone 'perpetual', peace.',<sup>550</sup> where the idea of self-justification resides in the act itself, and for this reason, Hegel can also maintain the argument that 'war is not to be regarded as an absolute evil and as a purely external accident.'<sup>551</sup> Indeed, the above statement from

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<sup>549</sup> Mikhail Bakunin. 'Letters to a Frenchman' in Bakunin on Anarchy, ed, and tr, Sam Dolgoff, (New York: Knopf, 1971) <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1870/letter-frenchman.htm> ,

<sup>550</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, # 324, p. 210

<sup>551</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, # 324, pp. 209-210.

Bakunin strikes deeply Hegelian chords and appears to borrow its essence from this passage in Hegel's *Phenomenology*:

In order not to let [the citizens] get rooted and settled in this isolation and thus break up the whole into fragments and let the common spirit evaporate, Government has from time to time to shake them to the very centre by War .... By thus breaking up the form of fixed stability, spirit guards the ethical order from sinking into merely natural existence, preserves the self of which it is conscious, and raises that self to the level of freedom and its own powers.<sup>552</sup>

If war must indeed 'shake' the masses, as Hegel and Bakunin seem to agree on, then the methods of war should inspire this motion. Indeed, this is the central aspect of the anarchist fighting doctrine, the propaganda of the deed, whereby the idea is infused directly into the action. Though it was first coined by the Italian Carlo Pisacane,<sup>553</sup> Bakunin was also amongst those who jumped on board and made use of the term soon thereafter. In fact, in the same letter quoted above, Bakunin also wrote:

'We must spread our principles, not with words but with deeds, for this is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda.'<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, vol. 2, tr. J. B. Baillie, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002) , p. 449

<sup>553</sup> F. della Feruta, ed. *Scrittori politici dell'Ottocento*, Tomo.1: *Giuseppe Mazzini e i democratici* (Napoli; Ricciardi 1959), pp. 1249-1252.

<sup>554</sup> Mikhail Bakunin. 'Letters to a Frenchman' in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, ed, and tr, Sam Dolgoff, (New York: Knopf, 1971) <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1870/letter-frenchman.htm> ,

What shape would these revolutionary actions take? It is a aspect of history which is perhaps too often forgotten in the mainstream today, but the anarchists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century succeeded in carrying out many high-profile acts of terror: the Wall Street Bombing of 1920, as well as the assassination an American president, two Spanish prime ministers, a French president, a Russian Tsar, a King of Greece, an Empress of Austria, an heir to the Austro-Hungarian empire and many other high ranking officials, and prominent nobles. Kropotkin argued that political assassinations were ethical even on the grounds which normally should exclude murder altogether, the Golden Rule itself: that one should treat others as one wishes to be treated. To this he replied, 'To kill not only a tyrant, but a mere viper. Yes, certainly! Because any man with a heart asks beforehand that he may be slain, if ever he becomes venomous; that a dagger may be plunged into his heart, if ever he should take the place of a dethroned tyrant.'<sup>555</sup> For anarchists, the choice of targets, attacking symbolic figures and never aiming at allies, peasants or proletarians, was in fact the justification for the act, embodied in the action itself.

Anarchists had no need for Clausewitz. They were not seeking *a policy* to guide their war, nor were they even institutionalized in way that would allow them to frame and generate centralized policy in the first place. What they sought instead was justification in the act itself as opposed to its potential, eventual outcome. So powerful was this principle that each element of the revolution had to be internally coherent, and justified in-itself that Kropotkin, for example, maintained that he would rather be killed than to kill someone who had done him no harm.<sup>556</sup> By making this exclusion, the anarchists were able to infuse violence with right directly, and by excluding the

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<sup>555</sup> D. Novak. 'Anarchism and Individual Terrorism', *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (May 1954), p. 177.

<sup>556</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *Anarchist Morality*, in Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets, (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2005), p. 100

principle of instrumentality, they reached a conceptual end-point to their ethical claims.

The problem which emerged is that they were in fact transposing the ethical logic that defines war as a right of peoples into a legitimization of the purified violence itself. The revolution was the process itself, for having extracted itself from the ends/means formula, and eventually, this implied that the revolution was in itself violence and only violence, that is, unlike the communists who could delineate between the violence of the revolution and the outcomes or other policies of the revolution, the anarchists, having so closely intertwined violence and revolution into a single set of self-justified acts and an internally coherent whole, could not distance themselves from the violence. New targets necessarily emerged each time one was put down, because there could be no deliberation to establish frame or limit this preconceived form of violence.

### Conclusion

Both the anarchist's understanding of violence as an objective right and the communist's violence as the instrument of policy of the subjective revolutionary state (against the subjective bourgeois state) must eventually attain an impasse in the hearts and minds of any free citizen, or citizen aspiring to political emancipation. In the former case, attempting to justify violence in-itself will necessarily breed critique, resentment, fear, etc. because, in associating violence directly, rather than indirectly to right, the anarchists turned the Hegelian logic of war as a 'right' inside out. In Hegel, the right to wage war was not inherent, but rested on the logos of 'actualized freedom', a voice of reason that forms in the confines of the state and frames its ethos

upon the development and constitution of the individual through phases of development in the family, in civil society, and the state; however, the anarchist's notion of a right to violence is not built and constituted, it is assumed, and it is not deliberated upon and rendered a manifestation of reason or collective intelligence, but acts silently, and according to its preordained logic, *a designed war*. It is the opposite of enacting war as a legitimate and free activity of citizens. As such, its violence does not include the citizen, but *excludes* him, and this exclusion self-defeats the notion of right, since this very right is derived from the inclusive ethical realm which the political community generates in the process of making policy manifest. Without this right, any application of force calls for resistance, because eventually the exclusion catches up, calling into question even the most basic anarchist assumption, that monarchs, bourgeois statesmen, and other perceived *usurpers* are *necessarily legitimate* targets. But this self-proclaimed legitimacy of violence is itself a product of usurpation, since it is a right belonging to constituted citizens, which has been extracted and detached via their exclusion from deliberation, and attached to pre-conceived notions of who the enemy is and what should be done to punish him. When war is not an instrument of policy, it eventually reaches an end point in its legitimacy and uptake amongst citizens, since their exclusion from policy is in effect a form of tyranny, in this case, tyranny of an immutable idea.

In the case of the communists, even though they claimed to frame instrumentality in policy, they nonetheless arrived at the very same impasse, because their revolution being pre-ordained, it may have been instrumental, it may have been a 'continuation of policy', but the mistake was to think that the project was in fact 'policy'. There is no true 'policy' without free and open deliberation. The communists were implementing the 'continuation of ideology' not a 'continuation of policy'. Both

groups were therefore condemned to exerting violence to sustain their inner logic, because there existed no means for policy-based checks and balances to this violence: the only possible containment or possibility of limiting their use of force was to meet it with a counter-force, on observation that Clausewitz had indeed made on the subject.<sup>557</sup>

In the end, the most dramatic manifestation of both the necessary dependence on violence and the distinct ethics and doctrines pitting anarchist against communist was how despite fighting a common enemy, they also fell regularly into serious in-fighting. With violence as both the tool and inner logic of their movements, when the two arrived face to face with an ethical and conceptual impasse between one's 'instrumentality' and one's 'right', the tension was unavoidable and the fighting inescapable.

The communist held a deep distrust of the anarchists because they thought their methods 'disarmed' the proletariat and 'prepared the ground for the politics of the enemy class.'<sup>558</sup> Meanwhile, the anarchist rejected the consolidation of state power in the hands of the communists, going so far as to attack, on one particular occasion, the Communist Headquarters in Moscow, during the Revolution, killing 12 and wounding 55, including Yuda Roshchin, the one anarchist leader who had tried to reconcile the two factions, but was jeered off as a traitor to the cause.<sup>559</sup> On another occasion, when Kropotkin died, Lenin wished to offer him a state funeral, but the family of the late anarchist rejected it, and instead, 20,000 people marched along his cortege waving placards and banners bearing demands for the release of all anarchists

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<sup>557</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*. Bk. I, Ch. 1, pp. 2-3.

<sup>558</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution in Spain*, tr. Morris Lewitt, (San Francisco: Bolerium Books, 1952) <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/spain/spain04.htm>

<sup>559</sup> Paul Avrich. 'Russian Anarchists and the Civil War', *Russian Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Jul., 1968), pp. 297-298.

from prison and such mottoes as ‘Where there is authority there is no freedom’ and ‘The liberation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves.’<sup>560</sup>

The instrumentality / right divide depended on different temporal schemes and therefore, it did not matter that the anarchist and communist were fighting for a same end purpose. The temporality of communism was sequential and that of the anarchists was simultaneous, and consequently, these two concepts of time being categorically exclusive, the linearity of one group was ethically inconsistent with the holistic vision of the other, since for one it meant the ends justifying the means, and for the other means being self-justifying. If either saw in the other the impossibility of revolutionary success or dangers of tyranny which it implied, it was because they were both right in their apprehensions regarding the other, though their idealism may have warped their ability to see the fault underlying their own self-defeating tyranny within.

Choosing Clausewitz as a mentor made sense to those who set out to fight a war *towards* their revolution. And choosing Hegel made sense to those who thought they could *embody* the ‘spirit’ of their revolution in itself. That being said, we find ourselves side by side with Aron who argued that Marxist view of war was merely partial, and Clausewitz’s all-encompassing.<sup>561</sup> The same could be said of the Anarchist view of war, relative to Hegels. In the end, however, the sheer violence of these partial propositions ultimately killed their universal idols. Both instrumentality and right are only ethical insofar as they are limited in their scope, and submitted to the living ethos of deliberative population who conceptualize what the ‘greater good’ entails, but the revolutionaries had dreamt up an unlimited, absolute war that marched forward regardless of consent: it might have been a war waged ‘for the people’, but

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<sup>560</sup> Ibid, pp. 297-298

<sup>561</sup> Julien Freund, *Guerre et politique de Karl von Clausewitz à Raymond Aron*, *Revue française de sociologie*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1976), p. 644



instead of being achieved 'by the people', it was achieved 'by the book'. Therefore it could not claim the legitimacy that this 'by the people' clause bestows on political (or anti-political) action.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis was grounded on a premise firmly rooted in the dialectical tradition: that the isolation as a method study has its limits, and sometimes one gets a better understanding not by delving deeper and deeper into a single direction, but rather by comparing ideas and considering their intersection. By studying Clausewitz, Hegel and Kant where they meet, we can heighten our understanding of how the methodologies found in all three were conducive to understanding war on three interrelated levels: a limited theory on the methods of war that imposes scepticism on claims that specific strategies and tactics can ‘cause’ victory; a dual ontological theory regarding war’s unbounded reciprocation of extremes and war’s embodiment in reality; and finally, a dual ethical theory of war, which clearly distinguishes war’s ‘instrumentality’ from the notion of ‘right’. Like dialectics themselves, this thesis is a balancing act, where the production of three insights into war is only made possible insofar as there is a limit set on how deeply each of three thinkers is explored in detail, so that there is space enough to explore what they achieved collectively.

If Part I focused on the intersection of Kant and Clausewitz, and Part II on the intersection of Clausewitz and Hegel, one should not therefore assume that this was in fact the purpose of either of the two parts: to showcase similarities or influences, and to stop there. To appreciate the purpose of both parts, it is best to take a step back to a more the larger picture of what we have accomplished throughout this thesis. Following the history of these ideas, from their genealogy to the exposition of their historical clash, there are two narrations happening in parallel: with regard to war’s ‘grammar,’ and with regard to war’s ‘logic’, to use Clausewitz’s terms.

We considered war's grammar, its interconnections from the simple, the noun or the verb, the building blocks which are the tactics and strategies, into its conceptual forms, the real and the absolute, ending with the question of 'greater good' by which an ethical frame which gives structure and meaning to how these are assembled and put into action. As the story evolved, we followed principally the evolution of fighting doctrines which began in the pseudo-sciences of the Enlightenment, which were negated, refuted, tossed into the abyss of time, but in the end instead of attaching fighting doctrines directly to the science or perfection of methodology, we noticed that it was in fact possible for these to be attached directly to the other two moments of development: the ontological and the ethical as well. Arguably, the frenzy of nationalism and total war experienced in the first and second World Wars were intertwined with the idea that the 'spirit' or 'total concept' of absolute war could be 'channelled' from the realm of the ideal and incarnated into a real manifestation. This however was a false synthesis. It was rather at the ethical realm that we finally came across a synthetic blockage that could in fact generate two separate fighting doctrines, one for each separate ethical system.

This story about the grammar of war as it evolved through time was the source of certain conclusions about the 'logic' proposed by the dialectical theories of war. On the one hand, the goal was to demonstrate that while the problems brought up in the Caveat regarding the works of Clausewitz and Hegel were of a certain conditional order, there could be a better solution to framing this discussion merely on conditions. Instead of repudiating the conclusions Hegel and Clausewitz in a wholesale manner, where the overall dismissals on technicalities, pinning synthetical judgements against analytical arguments, one could instead set limits to the holistic elements, as a means

of admitting final contradictions, without necessarily needing to demonstrate actual flaws in the theorizing.

By studying how the anarchists and communists integrated Hegel and Clausewitz, we were able to consider the tight relationship between ethics and fighting doctrines, and how these relate regardless of statehood, and are in fact more heavily anchored in the question of whether or not the state is perceived as the required tool for the achievement of a societal project. In this context, war is not ‘only war’ when it is fought by the state, as was alluded to in refutations of Clausewitz, but it is in fact true that war can take on very different forms when fought by the state, the state-seeking, or state-fearing. The separation of these three variants was not merely in regard to the institution itself, but the ethical relation that individuals and groups have towards it. The perception of greater good within the state, towards the state, or without the state, turned out to be more significant to fighting doctrines than the state itself, especially in the context of wars where the fighting doctrines were defined in their relation to war’s ethics, as opposed to war’s methods or war’s nature. There was no clearcut contradiction to be made on state wars and non-state wars to justify the kind of dismissals brought forward against Clausewitz, nor more so against Hegel. The question was far more fluid and complex and framed not on the state as a thing in itself, but as something that is perceived and manifested as relations within, relations outwards, and relations towards. We were forced to consider it as relative and living concept, rather than absolute and fixed one.

An important contribution that the dialectical theories of war provided posterity was grounding war once and for all in the human experience, away from an aesthetic of perfection derived from metaphysics and pre-conceived notions of what is ‘natural’ or ‘divine’. Even though Hegel and Clausewitz did return to this attempted

perfection of theory, where they thought it they might still ‘get away with it’ on the one level analysis where holism appeared legitimate, the ethical realm, this thesis attempted to take them down from this last pedestal as well. In effect, what we uncovered in the pages above was that if one turns the dialectics onto themselves, there is room for further critical analysis of the logic and its final claim to perfection. However, this is by no means a point of no return, it a mere line drawn in the sand. It is a process forward, because the final contradictions exposed above are perhaps fruitful and reconcilable. The limits set prepare the ground for further analysis, by calming the black and white dismissals of dialectical war theory and highlighting the many tones of grey that appear when we carefully split apart the ‘how’ the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of war. And these questions cannot be fixed in time, with one grand conclusion on the matter, since the methods of warfare change rapidly; since the ontological basis of war is a balancing act between the wars we fight and the wars we dream up; and since the ethics of war are always set at the ‘red line’, the threshold of what we are willing to tolerate, and what is to be understood as greater good and lesser evil, which may not be the most volatile of these three factors, but clearly the most determinant.

Many will not be satisfied with an ethical framework for war that is limited, constrained, and contradictory in such a fashion, because it requires far more effort to wrap our heads around it than, mere slogans like Kropotkin’s ‘absolute freedom’ that when critically assessed amount to very little because of the vagueness and scope of its claim, and yet, perhaps that is exactly this unsatisfactory concept of ethics, incomplete and uncertain that is needed to stimulate ourselves into truly personifying ‘Intelligence’ when we claim to be acting collectively in the name of reason.

Ultimately, helping to define the scope and limits of justification is perhaps greatest contribution dialectical reasoning can offer our reflexions on war: it clarifies and distinguishes those aspects of war that are conceptually limited and conceptually unlimited. In Hegel and Clausewitz, the dialectics of war purified our understanding of war's nature by stripping the concept to its core, eliminating the external layers such as tradition and convention, and allowing its political ethos to emerge from where it hid, behind the veil of nature and God, as a fix and unchanging thing over which mankind had no control, to a product of society, a phenomenon that is entirely man's to define and to embody, as a process of reciprocating his relationship with others. War is nothing more than this reciprocation, it is not God's will, it is not a natural instinct, it is only man's creation. As such, Hegel and Clausewitz provided us with a call to secularization and a call to responsabilization.

In their ethics, whether it is directly stated or tacitly implied, both Hegel and Clausewitz presented us with a phenomenologically unlimited ethical frame, which ultimately could be shown to have limits that were not merely conditional, but inherent to the the very idea. When both 'right' and 'instrumentality' were pushed to their extreme, in the context of revolutionary war that had universal and absolute goals, absolute weapons, and circular logic to sustain a fragile intellectual balance between war's means and its ends, for which the only solution was to relativize the absolute, we were forced to reclaim the centrality of policy-making and the role of the citizen in generating and embodying political rationality.

Once theological ethics have been replaced with secular ethics, the danger is to fall again into the trap of 'mystification', where the ideas of what we fight for are abstract and intangible, and detached the very source of what can make war ethical: the idea that where there is freedom, human rights, good government, and the absence of violence and cohercion, the secular conscience in the voice of the people is given the opportunity not

only to be heard, but also to be enacted as a process of liberation and human development. In that sense, though one can justify war as a right and as an instrument, this can only be done insofar as two criteria are met, first that this instrumentality and right are firmly grounded in the deliberative process that gives rise to their legitimacy as a 'greater good', and secondly that this process does indeed generate the expectation that a free and open deliberative process gives rise to reason, intelligence and 'Spirit' in the real world.

While both authors sought a holistic and nearly-divine concept of war ethics, as a trinity in the case of Clausewitz and as part of Geist making itself manifest in the world in the case of Hegel, what we found was that the theories could not perfectly achieve what they set out to, there were in fact inherent contradictions to the conclusions that war was either a 'right' or an 'instrument'. With regard to 'right' the problem was that the relationship between political decay and war could be shown to be reversible, in which case the social and ethical relationships that gave 'right' to war, could become undermined by forms of warfare that were contrary to the manifestation of these very ethical bonds. With regard to 'instrumentality', beyond the conditioned problem of weapons that undermine the strategic relationship between cause and effect, there was also the problem of concepts of war constructed in circular logic: the war to end all wars, where the means undermine the end, regardless of the specific form taken by the tool. We found that the holistic approaches of either Hegel or Clausewitz led to problems that were not merely conditioned, but were in fact unconditioned and necessarily implied in the concept.

Even though it took time and historical progress for these problems to show themselves, both as consequences of technology and ideology, they were not external counter-arguments like those which were explored earlier in the Caveat section of this



thesis. The arguments about historical inapplicability and self-fulfilling prophecies might have appeared convincing, but their general attempt to undermine the synthetic by providing analytical examples of inapplicability was incomplete. They could demonstrate errors of interpretation quite well. They could show specific weaknesses tied to specific examples, but they could not undo the holistic element. The counter-arguments provided were ambitious in their claims, but systematically hit at the margin because they were replicating the problem of not separating the synthetic from the analytical, and the conditioned from the unconditioned.

What differentiates this thesis from the example refutations provided in the Caveat was that it slowed down the process of analysis. By focusing on the development of the dialectical theories of war, it was possible to avoid considering Hegel and Clausewitz's conclusions until they had been framed within, rather than without their underlying logical constructs. It was precisely this that allowed us to break apart the synthetic from the analytical elements, and the condition from the unconditioned, to tailor the conclusions very carefully to where they applied. Instead of attempting a wholehearted rejection or elevation of Hegel and Clausewitz, the strategy was to set limits to their claims, at the very nexus of where both Hegel and Clausewitz have attempted a limitless, holistic argument, on the question of ethics. As was argued in the introduction to Part II, though the concept of goodness may have varied historically, it remains part and parcel with our concept of the divine, and though historical progress brought us to conceive a synthetic, modern, secular concept of goodness, there was no escaping the vestiges of meaning associated to the divine. This relationship explains why considering the political ethics that divide Hegel and Clausewitz could give us such a clear glimpse into the metaphysical aspect

of their argument. Ethics and holism come hand in hand, construed as a single divine light, an illumination that guides us like a beacon upon the hill.

It is therefore perhaps fitting that the exporation of the limits of this ‘light’ was modelled in part on the theory of optics. When waves are crossed one atop the other, should their amplitudes and frequencies coincide they may either add themselves or cancel each other out. At the intersection of ‘right’ and ‘instrumentality’, we could conceive where they came together, united under a single ‘holistic’ revolutionary project, but they also collapsed onto themselves and neutralized their light in opposition to one another, where the very critique of one relative to the other was the rationality that was required to set limits to its claims. Like the antinomies of reason we uncovered in Part I, it became possible at the intersection of ‘right’ and ‘instrumentality’ to uncover once again the problem of conditionality and unconditionality: the validity of either sides of the antinomy was not perfect in itself, but conceived as valid in the negation of its opposite. It was an argumentative construct that was giving impression that either of the ethics were ‘whole’ and perfect, in relation to the fault of the other, when in fact, we were being blinded by the light, its imperfections blurred by the halos. These imperfections were examined in theory in the two critiques brought forward in chapters 1 and 3 and then documented and tested in the historic case study of the anti-bourgeois revolutions. We found ourselves studying a war to end all wars (the first critique in chapter 3), which built its policy outside deliberation (the central critique in chapter 1), as ideology, and even culminated in the build-up of annihilatory weapons (the second critique in chapter 3) in the process, in the name of an objective that had the metaphysical properties of universality and absoluteness: the quest for ‘Absolute freedom, nothing but freedom,

all of freedom,'<sup>562</sup> so claimed Kropotkin. This objective brought us to the threshold required to consider our critiques in the context of limitless conflict, an 'absolute, absolute war' as it were, absolute for being revolutionary, and absolute again for being fought with absolute weapons and absolute objectives. This was precisely where we should expect to see the light amplified, or no longer to see the light at all.

The analytical breakdown in instrumentality and right could thus be observed empirically, by studying what happens when either concept of ethical justification for war are taken to their logical extreme, that is, when right and instrumentality are proclaimed as ethical concepts in-and-for-themselves, external and unconditioned. It was here that we observed that these lose the very ethical basis upon which they are meant to be drawn... their condition itself: constitution and the public appropriation of political violence via legitimate forms of deliberation that attempt to institutionalize rationality. This root of the ethics of 'right' and 'instrumentality' were entirely built on relativity, on the relationship between citizens, and their dialogues. The problem was that through a twist of logic, it appeared reasonable to withdraw 'dialogue' from the equation, and nonetheless claim, using dialectics, that one could equate 'speaking in twos' to 'the speaking of two'. The former is dialectics, the latter is dialogue. The one is absolute. The other is relative. Insofar as the 'instrumentality' and 'right' remained relative, rather than absolute concepts, they could indeed be validated, but when either was claimed as an absolute, this resulted in breakdowns in their logic, the appearance of absurd or illogical propositions. This being the natural limit of pure reason, so too did it appear as a limit to war ethics proclaimed in its name.

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<sup>562</sup> Kropotkin. 'Declaration to the Tribunal of Lyons, by the Accused Anarchists', in *Ni Dieu, Ni Maître*, Daniel Guérin (Lausanne : La Cité Editeur, 1969)

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